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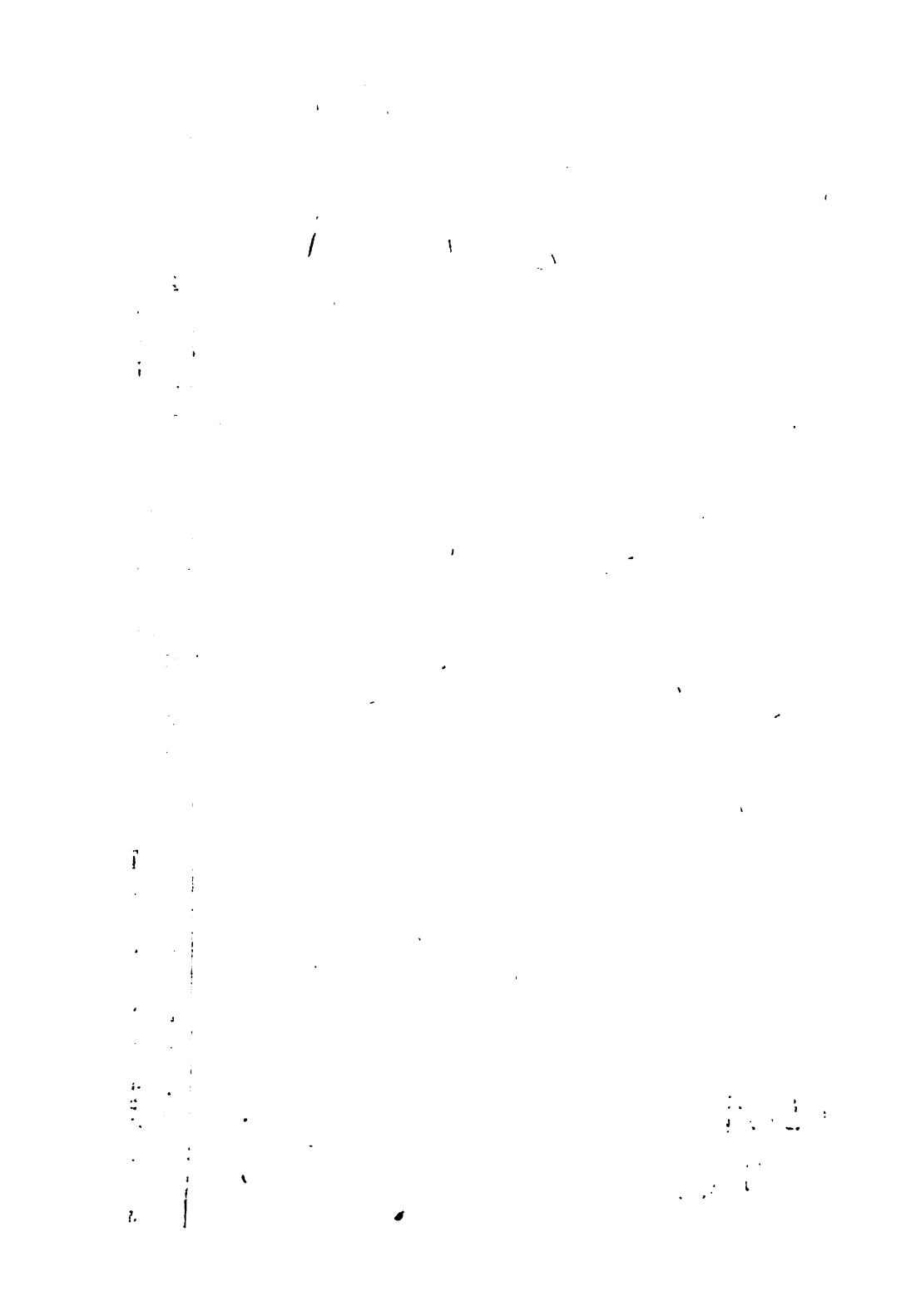
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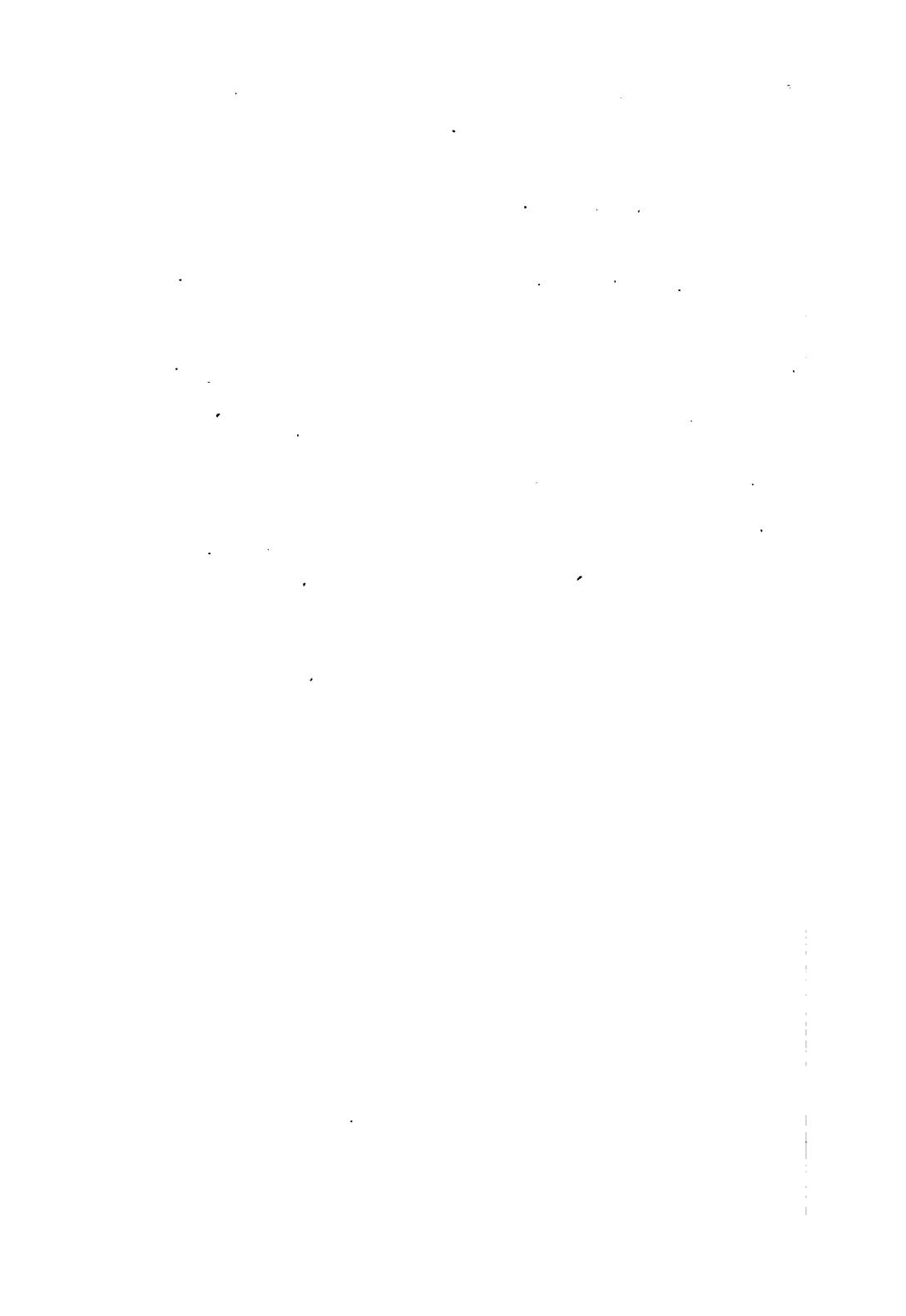
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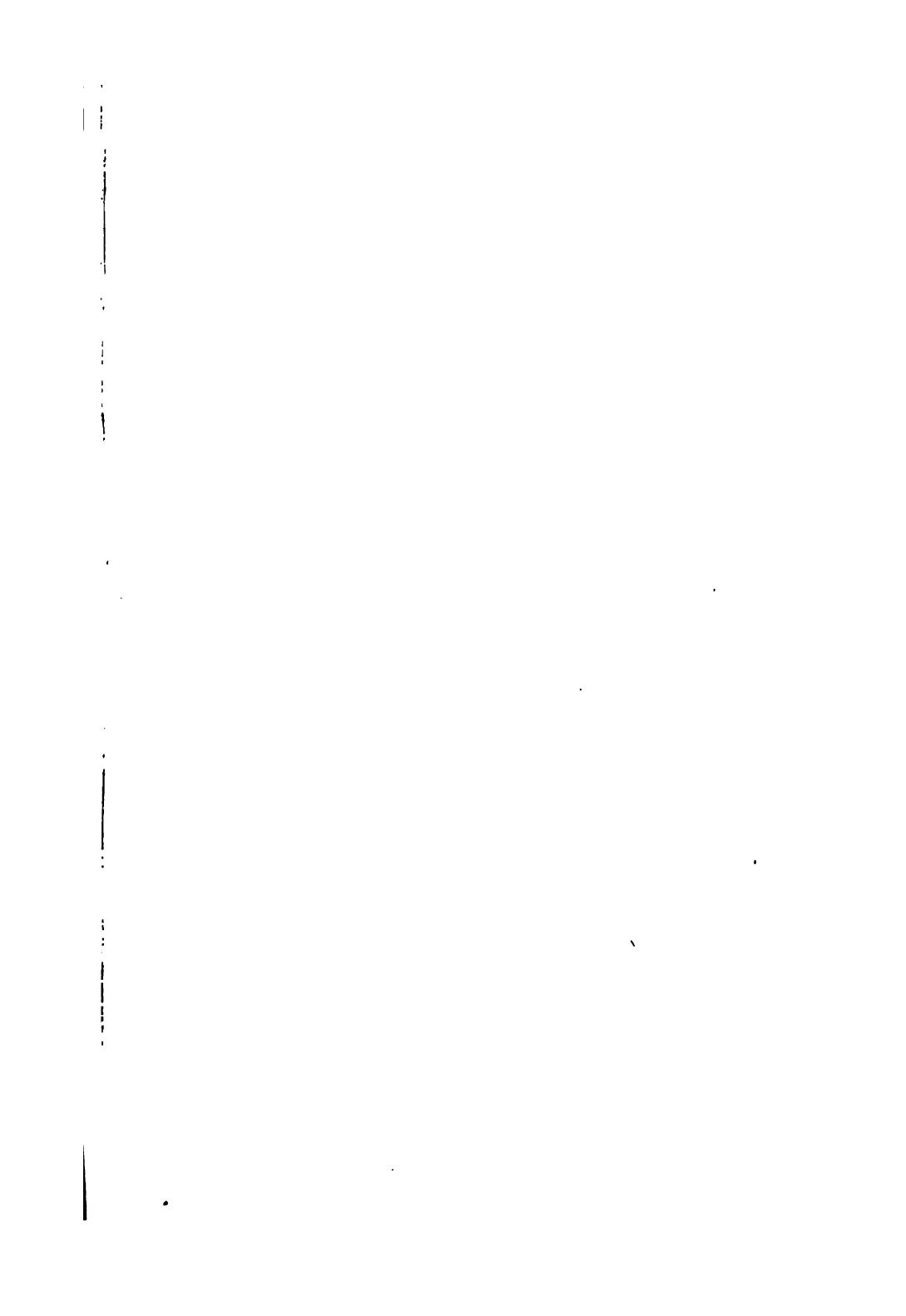


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1 Fiction

# **THE STRANGE CASE OF MARY PAGE**



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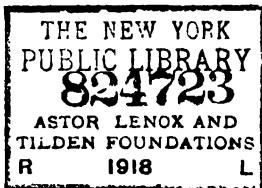
# THE STRANGE CASE OF MARY PAGE

BY  
**FREDERICK LEWIS**  
AUTHOR OF "WHAT HAPPENED TO MARY".

ILLUSTRATED BY  
**FANNY MUNSELL**  
AND WITH  
SCENES FROM THE PHOToplay



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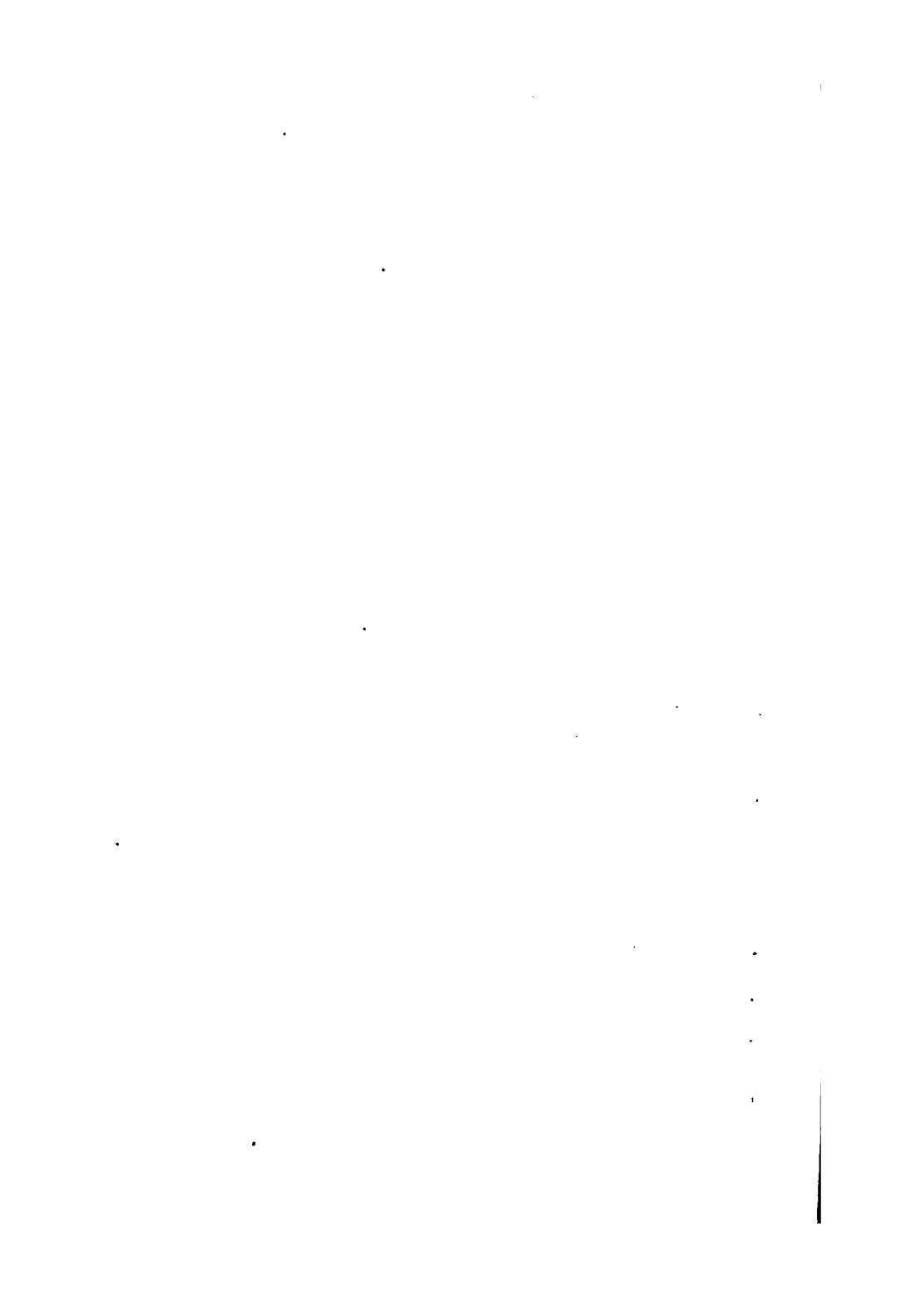
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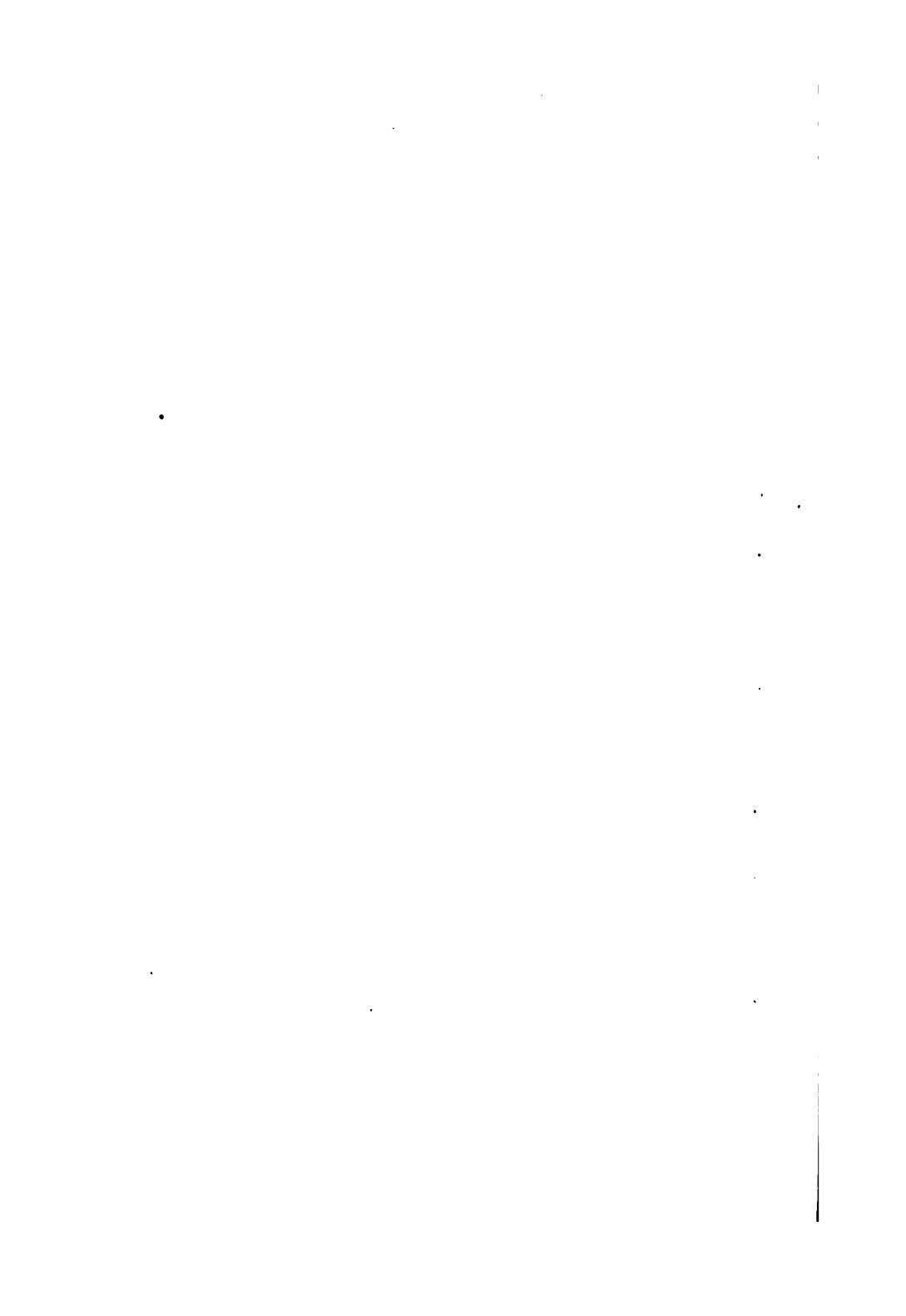
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# **THE STRANGE CASE OF MARY PAGE**



## CHAPTER I

### VAGUE FOREBODINGS

A TAXICAB drew out of the press of Fifth Avenue and paused before the Professional Building. As the driver threw open the door, a girl stepped out; a dainty creature with wind-tossed golden hair, and the bluest of eyes. As she paused to speak to the driver, a party of smartly-gowned girls was passing.

“Oh, look!” whispered one, her glance full of interest. “There’s Mary Page!” Instantly the eyes of the others were on the girl who had just alighted from the taxi.

“She’s exactly like her pictures in the magazines,” said another enthusiastically. “Oh, I love her eyes! Don’t you?”

“I thought she was the cutest thing in ‘The Voice of Time’ last season. I just raved over her!”

“The papers say she’s to be starred. Isn’t it wonderful! And only a few years

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## *THE STRANGE CASE*

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ago she was just in a little stock company."

Having given her instructions to the driver, Mary Page, all unconscious that she was an object of interest, went in at the huge arched entrance of the Professional Building. At one side there was row upon row of polished brass signs. She stood before them, hesitating. As her glance searched among the names, a close observer would have noted that her charming color paled, that a look of something very like fear came into her beautiful eyes.

"Dr. Foster," she said to herself, whisperingly, as though she dreaded that someone might overhear. "Suite 906."

The elevator rushed smoothly upward. At the ninth floor she got out and passed inquiringly along a quiet corridor. She at length found Dr. Foster's name lettered upon the ground glass of a door at the far end. She turned the knob and entered.

It was a large room, with the light quietly shaded. There were good prints upon the wall, and fine rugs upon the floor. But the furniture seemed meant for service only. At a desk sat a quiet-faced, com-

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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petent-looking girl in the immaculate dress of a nurse. She arose as the young woman entered.

"Miss Page? Oh, yes, I remember," she said in answer to Mary's question. "Dr. Foster is here and is expecting you."

She disappeared into an inner room, while Mary Page, trembling slightly, her hands tightly clasped, sank into a chair.

A bookcase was directly opposite her, across the room. In it were thick, professional-looking tomes. Almost unaware what she was doing, she read the titles. There was "Hollman's Diseased Mentality," "Scarborough on the Brain," "Mental Diagnosis," and dozens of others of like ominous character.

Mary Page turned her head swiftly, for the titles of these books seemed to sear her eyes. Her sweet mouth quivered. Her hands clasped each other more tightly than ever. Mute suffering showed itself in every line of her mobile face. In a few moments the nurse returned.

"Dr. Foster will see you," she said simply.

Mary Page passed through the door

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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which the sympathetic-looking nurse held open for her, and which was immediately closed behind her, to find herself in a high-ceilinged apartment with a cheerful, open fire, and an air of quiet elegance. A man stood upon the hearth-rug. A tall man with a strong face and the graying hair of fifty. He advanced and drew up an easy chair.

“Sit here, please,” he said quietly.

Mary Page obeyed in silence. Then she lifted her eyes to the face of the great alienist, who had resumed his place upon the hearth-rug. It was a grave face, an intellectual face; but it was a kind one. She should have nothing to fear from him.

“I—I could not find time to call yesterday,” she began nervously, “though I greatly desired to do so. The telephone is so unsatisfactory.”

Her voice sounded strangely in her own ears, strange and far away.

“I recalled the case when you mentioned it,” said the alienist. “And I have had the requisite time since then to look up my records. It is a very interesting case; a *most* interesting one. I am glad of any.

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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opportunity that may be given me to follow up its later developments."

His voice was quiet. Indeed, everything in the room seemed subdued, gentle, and hushed. And yet, in place of being soothed by this atmosphere, Mary Page felt that there was a something in the very air which seemed to beat with a frantic pulse. Perhaps, after all, it was her own heart.

"It all occurred so long ago," she said with her troubled air. "I was not at all sure that you would have any recollection of the matter."

She drew off her gloves and nervously began patting them and straightening out the fingers, her eyes downcast. Her hands were lovely, but full of character, the doctor noticed. His thick, partially gray brows were drawn together. From under them, he regarded her with keen interest.

"The name Langdon caught my attention," he said, with a certain suggestion of reserve in his tone and manner, "though I am afraid your name has for the moment escaped me." He gave her a propitiating smile.

She gave him a little smile in return.

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## **THE STRANGE CASE**

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With her training, gayety was easy to assume. For Mary Page knew the mechanics of her profession. But it did not need the sharp eye of Dr. Foster to recognize that that piteous little smile was only meant to cover the cowering something—the fear—which filled the heart of his visitor.

“You say you have a record of the case?” With an effort of will she compelled herself to meet the doctor’s earnest gaze. “Do you mean—everything?”

“Everything,” he reassured her. “In matters dealing with so delicate a subject as the mind, the very smallest point may be of the utmost significance.”

“Then,” she managed to say after a short pause, “there will be no necessity of going over the old ground again?”

“No,” said the alienist, “I don’t anticipate that that will be at all necessary.”

A gush of tears suddenly filled her eyes. She wiped them away without attempting to conceal them. Judging from her evident relief, her dread must have been immense.

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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“I am glad!” was all she said. “Then I shall only have to deal with later developments.”

“That is all,” Dr. Foster assured her again.

“In the very nature of things,” went on the girl in a low voice, “I am not the best judge of——”

“One moment, you will pardon me,” he interrupted her.

He left the room, going into a smaller one at one side, lined with filing cabinets and glittering with strange looking instruments and appliances. A muffled bell brought the nurse.

“I want to glance once more over that data I asked for yesterday,” he said in a low tone.

Deftly the nurse ran over the files. In a moment she placed some compactly written cards before him. He read them swiftly, his trained eye taking in the recorded details in a few seconds. He gave a little impatient scowl.

“Drink! It’s usually that,” he said to himself.

“Do you think it was only drink?” asked

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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the nurse. "To torture anyone would seem to indicate insanity as well."

"The most acute form of insanity I know of is caused by alcohol," the doctor answered. "Thank you, Miss Morris, that will be all." He gave back the cards into her outstretched hand. When he returned to the room in which Mary Page sat waiting for him, the nurse was already returning them to their place in the filing cabinet.

"The condition you spoke of yesterday over the telephone," began the doctor, seating himself in a chair directly opposite her, his keen eyes searching her face, "is one of the most interesting, perhaps, in the whole range of my particular branch of research. The term employed in defining it is 'Repressed psychosis,' which means a shock dormant in the brain, and only brought into activity by a repetition, at least in part, of the thing which originally caused it." Once more Mary Page's voice in her own ears had the effect of being far away.

"Then the condition is not unknown—not unique?"

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## OF MARY PAGE

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“ By no means; it is rare, but, as you say, it is not unique,” said the alienist.

There was a short pause. Then Dr. Foster went on:

“ I recall your friend Mr. Langdon very well indeed. I have had great pleasure in noting his rise in his profession.”

“ He has worked hard; I suppose young lawyers always have to.” Her tone was dully uninterested. She must have become conscious of it herself, for she added with more animation: “ He deserves his success.”

“ Success seldom comes without work in any profession—that is, success worth the name,” said the doctor.

Again silence fell between them. Mary Page returned to considering her gloves. Dr. Foster tapped softly upon the arm of his chair with his fingers. His expression was one of the deepest gravity. Apparently he was turning over some problem in his mind.

“ When did you begin to notice a resumption of the symptoms you mentioned?”

“ A few months ago.”

“ Excessive excitability, I think you said: periods in which the mind seemed to sus-

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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pend its action; an inability to recall what occurred during those periods."

Mary Page bowed her head. Her lips formed the word "yes," but no sound came from between them.

"In my records set down when Mr. Langdon brought you here some years ago, I made a note that a recurrence of the conditions might be expected," he said gently.

The beautiful face which Mary Page lifted to his was entirely colorless. Her eyes were filled with pleading, her sweet mouth trembled. Several times she essayed speech, and failed. It was as if she had suddenly been bereft of the power of utterance. Apparently, what she was vainly attempting to say was the crux of the situation. The doctor thought it best not to come to her aid.

"Please tell me the truth!" Her voice when she finally regained command of it was so faint that the doctor had to bend forward to hear her. Fear caused her breath to come in uneven gasps. "You do not think the condition an incurable one, do you?"

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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He shook his head. But his manner was still grave.

“ Properly understood, not necessarily so. But I must warn you that occasions which recall any sudden memories of the original shock which brought it about, should be avoided as far as possible. I cannot lay too much emphasis upon that.” His tone changed to one of the liveliest interest. “ Does the idea of intoxicants always have the same effect? ”

“ It seems to—nearly always.” She gave a gesture expressing the utmost loathing and repulsion. “ And the sight of a drunken person brings on a condition wholly frantic! ”

Dr. Foster nodded.

“ It is a curious phenomenon,” he nodded. “ And, as I have already said, I am indeed grateful for an opportunity of observing it.”

“ Will you tell me——” she began. But the alienist stopped her.

“ Before we go any further in the matter, I’d like to have another long, quiet talk with Mr. Langdon. It could be arranged, could it not? ”

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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“I think so,” said Mary Page wanly. “I will speak to him about it—perhaps tomorrow.”

“Do so.” The doctor rose, signifying that the interview was over. He stood looking down at her as she drew on her gloves.

“If you will pardon my saying so,” he said kindly, “fortune seems to have been kinder to you since I last saw you.”

“Yes?” she questioned. She seemed to be struggling to bring her mind back from the all-engrossing subject.

“Yes, it has.” She was now once more completely mistress of herself. “But I had a long trial, a long apprenticeship! I suppose, however, it was the same sort of thing that all girls have to experience who are poor and alone in a great, strange city. At first I thought I’d like being a nurse. I secured a position in a private hospital. But”—she made a little, expressive gesture—“I could not stand it.”

“Naturally not,” said the doctor understandingly. “Any way, the great majority of such places are mere frauds. I’m glad

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that you did not try to stay there." He held open the door for her to pass out.

"Good-by," he said gravely.

"Good-by, doctor."

In the doorway she came to a halt, and her white face, with its beautiful fear-filled eyes, was lifted to his. "Thank you," she said simply. She seemed about to go. But, suddenly, one trembling hand went out and convulsively clutched his sleeve.

"You will do all you can?" Her voice quivered.

"Be assured that I will certainly do all I can," he pledged himself.

"Good-by," she said once again. And then she was gone.

## CHAPTER II

### AT REHEARSAL

JANET, Mary Page's maid, busied herself over her mistress the next morning much like an industrious little wren.

"I think Mad'moiselle should not wear her hair so this morning," she suggested. Her capable hands held the shining mass in place. Her mouth was screwed disapprovingly to one side, as she regarded the effect.

"You liked it so a few days ago," said Mary with an indifferent look at her beautiful self in the mirror of her dressing table.

"Ah, yes, *then!*" Janet allowed the cascade of gold to fall about the girl's white shoulders. "But today, it ess dif'rant. Mad'moiselle is pale. Mad'moiselle have the tired look in the eyes. And the expression is ver' much change." Again Mary Page glanced at herself in the glass. But this time the inspection was longer.

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## ***STRANGE CASE OF MARY PAGE***

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She *was* pale. Her eyes *did* look tired. And the expression of which Janet complained was one of utter weariness. The bright beauty which her friends and her public so admired was momentarily dimmed.

Janet cleverly twisted the golden cloud in a manner nicely calculated to decrease the effect of all these things.

“Just a small touch of the rouge?” she suggested. “It does much to make up for the sleep when it is lost.”

Patiently Mary submitted herself to the ministrations of the adroit maid.

“What time is it, Janet?” she asked after she had finished dressing, and was adding a few last touches at the mirror.

“Nine forty-five, Mad’moiselle. You have fifteen minutes before the rehearsal begins. Shall I call a cab?”

“No. I think I shall walk. It may do me good.”

It was a brisk fall morning and as Mary Page left her hotel she felt the cool breeze gratefully upon her face. It brought some of the brightness to her eyes; indeed, by the time she reached the theater she had

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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thrown off her depression, and the little smile which she gave the grim back door-keeper was quite like her old self.

Covington's Theater was on a cross-town street, only a few steps from Broadway, a new building, sheathed in lights, and with all the garish magnificence thought necessary for a modern temple of the drama. Covington, the man who built it, had been an original genius. He had inspired and staged some strikingly effective productions; as they were one and all profitable successes, Covington became imbued with the idea of a "personal" theater to house his efforts. As money is seldom lacking in an enterprise of this sort, "Covingtons" was built. Its opening bill was coldly received; stung by this unexpected event, the manager rashly threw a huge fortune into his next production, thinking to buy public favor. The result was a crashing failure which startled Broadway. And Broadway, as everyone knows, is not startled easily. In three months all that was left of Covington's was his name over the theater; and "Ted"

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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Daniels was in proud possession as lessee and manager.

“I don’t get the Daniels proposition at all,” said one worldly-wise Broadwayite to another. “Only a month ago he was trying to steer a little three by four vaudeville agency clear of the rocks; now I find him shining like a full-fed moon in the private office of Covington’s, and with his name painted on the door.”

“It’s easily explained, if you look a little farther than Daniels,” said the second habitué of Peacock Alley. “Dave Pollock, the wine agent, is the answer to the conundrum. It’s his money that’s to reopen the Covington. Daniels is doing the posing; but if you want the boss of the works, why, Pollock’s your man.”

Mary Page walked quietly through a rather dimly lighted passage and stepped upon the stage. This latter, stripped of every shred of scenery, was wide, lofty, and empty. At each side could be seen little winding iron staircases, with numbered doors at each landing, which formed the entrances to the dressing-rooms. The “fly” galleries, for the use of the stage

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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hands in managing the "drops," hung skeleton like, the long rows of electric bulbs, which Covington had installed to light his stage from above, were cold-looking and dusty. Out in the auditorium the shadows were deep; row after row of seats, shrouded in gray clothes, loomed up like ghosts; the sounds made by some workmen echoed and re-echoed through the vast empty galleries. Lonely drafts of air sent a chill through Mary Page as she paused.

Chairs were set out upon the stage at regular intervals; near the rows of blank, soulless footlights was a table at which two men were sitting, a manuscript spread out before them. Little groups of men and women were gathered at the sides, waiting.

A gaunt, elderly man, with a badly made toupee stuck tightly upon an area of bald scalp, bowed elaborately to Mary as she joined her colleagues.

"Ah, Miss Page, good morning."

"Good morning, Mr. Laclells," smiled she. "I wonder have I been keeping you all waiting?"

"Not at all. Mr. Wells and the author," with a nod toward the two men at the table,

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## OF MARY PAGE

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“are working up some new business for the third act.”

“If I’d known they wouldn’t start at ten sharp, as they said,” spoke a stout and tightly corsetted woman, “I’d had another bit of ‘beauty’ sleep.” She regarded herself in a little round glass taken from a hand-bag and dabbed at her nose with a handkerchief. “Heaven knows I’m beginning to need it. In two seasons more, if I keep on, I’ll be playing kind old mothers, and glad to get even them.”

“I hear we’re to open on the eighteenth, Miss Page,” said a tall girl who looked extremely well in her smart gown. “Do you know if it’s so?”

“Yes, Mr. Daniels mentioned the matter to me yesterday. It will be Hartford, I think, for the try-out.”

The tall girl pursed up her red lips dolefully at the prospect of so many hurried rehearsals.

“I was in hopes there was nothing in it,” she complained. “I don’t see how I’m going to be right in that short time, for there’s forty sides to my part and I’m the slowest study in the business.”

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## ***THE STRANGE CASE***

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Here Wells, the stage director, a tall man who wore huge tortoise-rimmed glasses hanging from a broad ribbon of black, arose to his feet.

“If you’ll try to get along with about half that noise,” spoke he, addressing the mechanics who were at work in the balcony, “we’d like to begin here.” Then turning to the assembled players, he added: “Second act. Mrs. Pullinger-Jones’s drawing-room, Riverside Drive. Parker, the butler, enters. Parker,” to the man with the toupee, “up there. Mrs. Pullinger-Jones,” to the tightly corsetted woman, “the sofa’s there.”

The rehearsal began, the voices of the players sounding queerly in the huge spaces of the empty theater. Outside the range of chairs some of the people conned the typewritten “parts,” others walked softly up and down with bent heads, their lips moving, but making no sound.

“Just a moment!” The stage director now arose and stopped the man with the toupee as he was about to extend toward the stout lady an entirely fictitious salver upon which was an equally imaginary card.

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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“You are an English butler,” continued the director, in a voice of complaint, “a trained butler, mind you—trained in England, and you are taking in a visitor’s card to your mistress. But you do it like a plumber’s helper carrying a kit of tools into the back room of a saloon. Watch me; this is how it should be done.”

The method of the man with the toupee had been somewhat high colored; but Wells elaborated upon the idea until the entrance of the butler resembled that of a titulary prince in a romantic spectacle. Leaving the interpreter of the servant to struggle with this impersonation, Wells went back to the table. Redfield, the author, leaned toward him.

“I say, old chap,” said he, in a low tone, “don’t you think you’ve rather set the pace for Parker? You know any butler who would conduct himself up to your notion would have the fire department called out to suppress him.”

“It’s what the public wants,” stated Wells, with finality. “The popular idea of a first-rate job of butting is the way it’s done in musical comedy.”

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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“But don’t you think in a play of this sort——”

“To get things over, you’ve got to slap the stuff on them,” maintained Wells, watching the scene under rehearsal. “I don’t want to give offense to you, but it don’t make any difference what an author or anyone else thinks of his story or his characters. It’s what the public thinks of them that counts.”

Redfield stuffed his hands into his pockets, shrugged his shoulders, and left the table. Walking up stage, he stopped at Mary’s side.

“I wanted to speak to you yesterday about that scene between *Nora* and her employers. But you left before I had the chance.” His eyes glowed warmly. “By Jove, do you know, I never really knew *Nora* until you showed her to me.”

The beautiful face of the girl lighted with enthusiasm; in the interest she felt in her art, the forebodings and anxiety which rested so heavily upon her were forgotten for a brief moment.

“That is one of the very nicest things I’ve ever had said to me,” she answered,

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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her beautiful teeth showing dazzlingly between the red of her lips.

“If you can grasp the meaning of *Nora* so firmly in rehearsal,” stated the dramatist, “what will you do when you’ve finished your study of her—when you have an audience to follow you?”

“She’s a beautiful character,” said Mary with appreciation in her blue eyes. “She has a soul, Mr. Redfield, and I’m thankful to you and to the management for the chance to interpret it.”

Just then a short, thick-necked man with a cigar in his mouth, made his way through a box and appeared upon the stage through a small door. He had loose, thick lips and furtive, shifty eyes.

“Hello!” greeted this personage, his cigar in one corner of his mouth, his heavy hands clasped behind him. “What’s the good word?”

“I think we are doing fairly well, all things considered,” answered Redfield, his glance going to the stage director, who was deep in an exposition of a new passage.

“Well, you ought to,” commented Dan-

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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iels. He knocked the ash from his cigar. "Things don't always break as good as they have for this show. We were in luck in getting that guy Wells, over there. He put on 'Whirling Around' after three other ginks had dropped it as no good, and he made it a knock-out."

"I see," said Redfield.

"And then, here's Miss Page." The heavy hand of Daniels gestured full approval of her. "She's a comer; she's got a following that will pack this house to the peak; she's a good looker, and knows how to wear clothes, and, and——"

As he seemed at loss for any more equally admirable qualities, Redfield suggested dryly:

"And she can act a little."

"Sure!" Daniels seemed greatly pleased at this addition. "So she can. And after Wells puts her through a couple of weeks, and rakes over the slow spots in the play, we'll have something real to show them."

Here a slight bustle arose over the sounds of the rehearsal.

"Yes, sir," spoke a voice from the audi-

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## OF MARY PAGE

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torium, "Mr. Daniels is back there. Went back a few minutes ago."

Through the box from which the manager had made his appearance came two men whom Daniels at once hurried to and greeted with bubbling cordiality.

"Hello, Pollock! How are you? Glad to see you. Been expecting you for an hour."

"I happened to be passing here," said the man addressed, coolly. "You've met Mr. Shale, I think."

"Sure." Daniels shook the second man by the hand. "I had the honor of busting through a couple of bottles with him the other night at Rector's."

Shale was a thick-set man with a disagreeably blotched face, outstanding ears, and hard little eyes. That he had been drinking was evident, for his speech was thick and his step was markedly uncertain.

"'Member Mr. Daniels ver' well," said this gentleman. "Nice fellah. Knows wine like a book."

Pollock was a man of about thirty-five; tall, of graceful build, and dressed with

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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care and taste. He had quick, flashing black eyes which might have belonged to either a poet or a roué; his features were classically Greek, and in repose were singularly striking. Underneath a suave veneer of accustomed courtesy was a lurking expression of recklessness, fine lines of dissipation were showing here and there, an ominous promise of the heavy stamp which the future must impress.

“Ah, yes, Daniels knows wine,” said this person, as he lighted a cigarette. “He’s drunk enough of it to hail it by the name of brother.”

The manager and Shale laughed as though they considered this a most excellent witticism; Mary Page, in the midst of a brief scene, faltered in her lines and stopped short.

“I’d like to have some quiet,” spoke Wells, glancing in their direction with the assurance of a sought-for director. “We can’t go on with a rehearsal like this, Mr. Daniels.”

“All right, all right,” said the manager testily. “Don’t get peevish, Wells.”

“Don’t know much ‘bout show business,”

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## OF MARY, PAGE

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said Shale to Daniels. "In the liquor line myself. Good biznish in New York; lots of booze drunk here." The hard eyes, wavering with drink, went to Pollock, who was watching the rehearsal. "There's a fellah," Shale told Daniels admiringly, "who can sell more goods'n any other six agents in this town. He's got a born talent for it."

But Pollock paid no heed to this praise; he was watching the scene intently. Mary Page, her beautiful eyes flashing, her golden head high held, was standing, as *Nora*, in the midst of her slanderers and throwing their lies back at them with a passion and intensity which swept even the grudging stage director off his feet. Her spirit seemed contagious; the other players caught eagerly at their cues, and the scene went through with the enthusiasm of a finished effort.

"Excellent!" spoke Wells. "Show me some of that in the other scenes and I'll be satisfied."

"Wash show iz 'is?" breathed Shale in his companion's ear.

"It is called 'Seekers,'" replied Pol-

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## *THE STRANGE CASE*

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lock, his dark eyes never leaving the face of the girl.

“Fine title,” admired Shale. “Fine! Like it immensely. Means a lot.”

Mary, her eyes alight with the excitement of the scene, made a hurried exit. Pollock met her, hat in hand, his handsome head bent in greeting.

“I say,” said he, “that was cleverly done, do you know? My congratulations.”

“Oh, how do you do, Mr. Pollock,” said Mary. “It’s a splendid scene, isn’t it?”

“By Jove,” exclaimed Pollock, his bold eyes going from the beautiful flushed face to the crown of hair, gleaming in the border lights, to the pretty swelling lines of her figure, “you went after them like a young panther.”

“If I can only bring out a part of Mr. Redfield’s meaning,” cried Mary, her hands clasped fervently, “I will be satisfied.”

“You’ll bring out everything that’s in the rôle,” said Pollock confidently, a smile of encouragement upon his finely-cut, dissipated face. Then with an eager look in his dark eyes: “Do you know, I’d never have dreamed that you could look like

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you did just then." He went nearer to her. "If you have the same effect upon your first night audience as you've had upon me, your name will be flaming in every newspaper on the day following. But, then," and the fine head bent close to the golden one, "a beautiful woman will always impress people."

Mary drew instinctively back; there was a meaning in his handsome face which she could not read, and yet which warned her.

"Do you think just mere looks have any value?" she asked. "Are they not a sort of accident? One can hardly claim credit for their possession. A woman who can only secure attention because of her beauty must come, in the end, to fairly hate herself."

"Oh, I say, now!" laughed he. "That's a bit rough, isn't it, Miss Page?"

"I don't think so," said Mary gravely. "At any rate, the only success a true artist can have is that which follows her work and grows with it."

Here Shale approached, his step more uncertain than ever in the semi-gloom of the stage.

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## **STRANGE CASE OF MARY PAGE**

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“Pollock, ol’ fellah,” said he, “in’duce me to your friend, eh?”

“Look here, Dick!” exclaimed Pollock vexedly, “go sit down somewhere, will you? You’re a nuisance!”

“Go t’ the devil!” protested Shale. His wavering eyes tried to fix themselves upon Mary. “I’ll in’duce myself.”

This he proceeded to do; his breathing was rather difficult and the odor of liquor was fairly nauseating. A pallor appeared in Mary’s face.

“My cue will be spoken in a few minutes,” she said hurriedly, as she turned away. “Pardon me.”

Shale watched her retreating figure, stonily.

“Good looker,” pronounced he. “You always pick out good-lookers, Pollock. Taste does you credit.”

The grim looking door-keeper now appeared.

“Party asking for you,” said he to Daniels. “Name of Langdon.”

“All right,” said the manager of the Covington. “Let him come in.”

## CHAPTER III

### THE FIGHT IN THE THEATER

A FEW minutes later a young man entered and looked about. He was dressed in a gray business suit and carried a leather document case in one hand. There was about him a resolute air; his well-turned chin was strong, his good-humored mouth showed purpose, and his eyes, brown like his thick hair, were well opened and steady.

Almost instantly his eyes, searching for Daniels in the gloom, rested upon Mary Page, and he advanced toward her, his hand outheld.

“ Philip!” Her eyes were wide with pleasure and surprise.

He took her hand; there was something in the way he did it which suggested the lover, a lingering something that was tender and glad.

“ I know that it must seem as though I’d dropped from the sky,” said he.

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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“It’s the first time I’ve ever seen you in the theater—behind,” she smiled.

“And I don’t think I’d have shown myself now if I had not been directed to hunt up Mr. Daniels here.”

“Oh, you know Mr. Daniels?” There was surprise in her tone.

“Why, only in a professional way,” he smiled at her expression. “He doesn’t strike you as a fit sort for me to know, then?”

“Oh, he’s well enough, I suppose!” She shrugged her shapely shoulders and made a little grimace. “One can’t hope for everything.”

A strand of her shining hair had freed itself and fell like a sunbeam across her cheek. He touched it softly; she laughed a little, and her deft fingers placed the temptation beyond his reach.

“I rang you up last evening,” said he. “But Janet told me you had retired.” His face now expressed much concern. “You weren’t ill?” he questioned.

A shadow came over the bright face; she looked at him with something of the same expression in her eyes which had been in

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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them on her visit to Dr. Foster's office the day before.

"I had a headache," she said. "And I thought I'd best economize my energy." Her hand rested upon his sleeve for an instant caressingly. "But, if I had known—"

"No, no," said Langdon hastily. "I wouldn't have had you for the world. I only wanted to drag you off to dinner somewhere. You must not waste your strength. You have quite an ordeal ahead of you, you know."

She smiled up at him with that happy confidence which has but one meaning.

"You take very good care of me, Philip," she said. "Very good care, my dear."

David Pollock, across the stage, was watching the two from under his bent brows. There was something in their attitudes, in their proximity, which caused him to set his jaw; the faint, yet distinctive lines which his manner of life had traced in his face, seemed suddenly to deepen and the sneer upon his lips made him almost repulsive. He spoke to Daniels.

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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“What the devil is that fellow doing here?”

“Who, Langdon?” The manager seemed surprised. “Why, he’s been drawing up the papers you and I talked over. He’s got a big reputation for such things; they say he makes ‘em almost bullet-proof.”

“I see!” The sneer deepened as Pollock once more turned his gaze toward Mary Page and Langdon. “Well, as I’m here to finish up this business, suppose we get to it.”

“Right-o!” replied Daniels, with unction. Then, lifting his voice, he called: “Now, then, Langdon, if you don’t mind.” Langdon turned his head.

“Very well,” said he. Then to Mary: “You’ll pardon me, won’t you? There’s some business papers to be signed.” He was about to leave her, but paused, adding eagerly: “You’ll not forget—at seven-thirty.”

“I’ll not forget,” she smiled at his manner. “Run along now; they seem to be impatient.”

With a soft pressure of the hand Lang-

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### *OF MARY PAGE*

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don left her and following the manager, Pollock and Shale, he left the stage.

The four men climbed the flight of broad, softly-carpeted stairs to the balcony; for it was there, in the rear, that the office of the manager of Covington's Theater was located.

"The treasurer tells me that the advance sale is going strong," Daniels told Pollock as he unlocked the office door and held it open for the others to enter. "Seats two weeks in advance of an untried show is going some, but the space we're taking in the papers, and the name of the star are pulling hard."

Langdon and Shale entered the office, but Pollock, instead of following, motioned to Daniels to shut the door. The manager, a little surprised, did so, and then looked at the other inquiringly.

Pollock leaned against the back of one of the last row of chairs; down in the front of the balcony and overhanging the main floor the workmen had a sort of scaffold built, from which they were installing some lights; farther away, upon the shadowy stage, could be seen the dim forms of the

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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rehearsing players; and their voices came hollowly from the great vacant space. Pollock stood looking first at the busy workmen and then at the stage; finally he spoke.

“ You’ve known me for quite some time,” said he to Daniels. “ And you know I seldom go into any sort of enterprise in which I don’t see my way very clearly.”

Daniels laughed, and the sound went echoing and re-echoing among the vacancies.

“ I never caught you anywhere with your eyes shut,” proclaimed he. “ There ain’t anybody I know who’s cut their eye teeth any cleaner than you have.”

There was a moment’s silence; a thin yellowish light showed from a few branches in the balcony; and in this, the face of Pollock was not pleasant to see.

“ Once or twice in the past few weeks,” he said at length, “ I’ve heard comment upon my judgment in backing this venture. And it was not all favorable comment, by any means. Some of it was to the effect that this was an unlucky house, that it had, so to speak, a black eye, that a

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crowd couldn't be got into it, no matter what was offered them."

Daniels apparently, also, had heard something of the kind, and it was evident that he did not carry the matter with Pollock's ease.

"Besides this," added the other. "I've had the fact pointed out to me that you've never tackled a job the size of this one, or anything like it; that you are a small time vaudeville man, and—"

"Say," interrupted Daniels, his heavy jowls swelling with resentment, "the town's full of knockers and they don't care who they perform on. A man that's framed up the bills that I have is able to fill any job on Broadway. And a show's a show! There ain't a bit of difference between—"

"Let's talk about that later," said Pollock. "Just now I've got something more important."

He tapped for a moment upon the back of the chair.

"My business is looking after about a dozen kinds of wines," said he, "and seeing that Broadway drinks them. My flyer into the theatrical game is a side issue entirely."

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## **THE STRANGE CASE**

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“That’s all right, but you’re going to pull a nice profit out of it, just the same,” protested Daniels. “You’re going to——”

Pollock laughed shortly, the polished nail still tapped upon the chair back.

“I’m interested in Mary Page,” said he. “She’s ambitious; she wants to put over something in this ‘uplift drama’ thing, and I want to give her a chance.”

“Sure,” said the manager, with a kind of smile on his loose lips. “I understand.”

“The reputation of Covington’s as an unlucky house doesn’t affect me in the least,” stated Pollock. “And the fact that you haven’t any experience in the legitimate doesn’t bother me at all. I haven’t the faintest interest in the theater, the management of the play. It’s the girl alone who interests me. Do you understand?”

“Perfectly,” replied Daniels.

“If there are any profits,” said Pollock, “why, I’ll pocket my share of them, of course. But I don’t look to the box office for anything. I expect my reward to come from another direction.”

“I get you,” said the manager. “I’ve

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seen little arrangements like this carried out before."

"Very well, then," said Pollock. "I was of the opinion that you understood, but I desired to make sure of it."

There was a little more passed between the two; then they entered the office. Shale was nodding stupidly in a chair, his mouth open in an ugly way; the clean-cut, decisive face of Langdon was bent over some papers which he was arranging.

"If you'll look over these, Mr. Daniels," said the young attorney, "I think you'll find them all ready for the signatures."

As Daniels conned the papers, his thick lips mumbling the legal phrases in an undertone, Pollock looked at Langdon. He said:

"Rather a surprise to meet you here today."

"Yes," replied Langdon briefly.

"I don't think"—and Pollock elevated his eyebrows, as though trying to recall a date—"I don't think we've met since that—you recall the occasion?"

"Yes," said Langdon, as briefly as before. But this time an angry red began to

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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touch his cheeks and his resolute eyes narrowed.

Pollock looked at him, the same sneer which he had worn while watching the little scene between Langdon and Mary marring his handsome face.

“And all the time you’ve kept up your acquaintance with Mary Page, eh?”

“I have,” replied Langdon.

Pollock was about to speak once more when Daniels turned to him with the papers.

“These seem all right to me,” said he, as he held them out to Pollock. “Have a look.”

Pollock put the papers on the table without reading, and picked up a pen.

“Where do you sign?” he asked of Langdon.

The young attorney coldly pointed out the place, and the wine agent attached his signature. Pollock then handed the pen to Daniels, and while that personage was also attaching his name to the papers, he spoke once more to Langdon.

“Do you know,” said he, “I’m rather surprised at the duration of your—your

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acquaintanceship with Miss Page. Such things don't usually last that long."

Langdon pushed back his chair and got up suddenly.

"There's always been something behind these sayings of yours, Pollock. What is it you mean? Out with it. If there is anything in your mind that you desire to say to me, now is the time."

Amazed at this sudden outburst, Daniels stood with his hands upon the desk staring at them, his loose mouth slack, his eyes bulging.

Pollock's sneer was more pronounced than before; he prodded at a pattern in the office rug with the end of his stick.

"I thought you said you recalled—that night," said he.

Langdon's face suddenly contorted; it was as though the other's words had brought on an acute mental wrench.

"Well," said he grimly, crushing back all evidence of feeling.

"I wouldn't have thought you'd kept up your pursuit of Mary Page after that," said Pollock steadily.

Langdon's strong hands gripped the edge

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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of the desk against which he leaned. There was that in his face which caused Daniels to cry out:

“Take care, there! None of that kind of stuff here, Langdon!”

Langdon silenced the man with one upheld hand; but he never took his burning eyes from Pollock.

“Why?” said he, in a voice unnaturally husky. “Why?”

Pollock shrugged his shoulders and smiled. He still prodded at the rug with his cane.

“Oh, well, if you *will* have the thing frankly brutal, why, it’s not my place to be squeamish. What I mean is: Do you think a girl like that should marry a man like you?”

Langdon’s face was now as white as death, and his eyes burned like live coals. Daniels once more interposed between them but the young attorney dashed him aside with one sweep of his arm. Daniels threw open the door.

“Hello! Conroy, Peters, Jackson! Get a move on up here, quick!” he shouted to the men at work in the balcony.

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But Langdon gave no heed to the actions or words of the manager; his burning eyes were fixed upon Pollock.

“Once before you said a thing like that to me,” spoke he, in the strange, husky voice. “And it was upon that night which you take so much pleasure in recalling.” He took a step toward the other, one hand outstretched. “But you do not remember what I then said I’d do if you ever repeated it?”

“I can’t say that I do,” said he.

“I said that I’d have your life!” Like a tiger the attorney leaped upon the wine agent. Pollock met the shock with ready skill and great strength. But the force of Langdon’s rush was not easily broken. Across the room staggered Pollock, a small stream of blood trickling down one cheek; then once more Langdon was upon him. They clinched and went crashing through the door and into the balcony.

“Stop that fellow!” roared Daniels. “He’s a madman!”

Pollock tore himself free from Langdon’s clutch and aimed a vicious blow at him. But the young man evaded it and

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## ***STRANGE CASE OF MARY PAGE***

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drove his right hand crushingly into the handsome, evil face. Here the stage hands, a brawny lot, arrived on the scene and threw themselves upon Langdon. But with a strength that was unnatural, he scattered them with his smashing blows. Once more he clutched at the throat of Pollock; they tripped and fell, rolling heavily down the steep stairs toward the balcony rail.

A scream came from Mary Page, who stood, her white face turned upward, upon the stage; the next instant the two twisting bodies struck the scaffolding upon the balcony's edge; it gave way with a splintering crash and with a huge, pendant-hung electrolier, went smashing to the floor below. The two men, still gripped together and struggling for the mastery, shot over the rail and went whirling downward.

## CHAPTER IV

### SHALE HAS A BAD QUARTER OF AN HOUR

THAT Philip Langdon and David Pollock were not instantly killed in their terrific fall from the balcony of Covington's Theater is more due to the interposing hand of chance than anything else. The scaffolding which the workmen had been using and which had been wrecked under the impact of the two whirling bodies, had, unfortunately, not fallen entirely. The ends of some of the longer planks had caught among the protruding electric fixtures at the lower edge of the balcony; upon these in their turn, some of the shorter fragments had caught; the two men, still clinched in their desperate struggle, struck these and slid the greater part of the way toward the floor. Then this frail support gave way; with a crash, the timbers struck the rigid uprearing back of the seats be-

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## *THE STRANGE CASE*

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low; and the two frenzied men, their hands gripping each other's throats, were buried in the débris.

Some of the more active workmen climbed over the balcony rail and dropped into the aisles; others hurried for the stairs and their feet were heard thundering on the bare boards as they rushed downward. The rehearsing company upon the stage, being nearer, reached the spot first. Redfield, Wells, and the actors were clearing away the splintered planks when the others arrived; and then the two men bruised, bleeding, and almost senseless from shock, were dragg'd out.

“Philip!” Mary Page was at Langdon's side almost on the instant.

The young man's eyes were staring and fixed; through his dazed mind the thought was re-forming that there was something to be combated, a force opposed to him was, for some dim reason, to be conquered; his hands clenched, his breath was short and labored.

“Philip, dear!” Mary whispered this in his ear. “Look at me. Please, Philip!”

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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Slowly the eyes turned to her face, and slowly the stars faded.

"Are you hurt?" breathed Mary. "Oh, my dear, are you hurt?"

He struggled painfully up; her strong young arms supported him.

"No. I think not," he said. "At least, not seriously."

Pollock was also upon his feet by this, white of face and considerably shaken. But he kept his poise; his manner was careless, and though his lips were bleeding, he smiled.

"All right?" asked the Covington manager anxiously.

"As sound as ever," replied Pollock, but a little faintly.

"Ain't there something we can do?" asked Shale, somewhat sobered by the whole matter. "Can't we get a doctor to look you over?"

"No," said Pollock. "There is nothing I want except a cab, and," here his fine eyes glittered wickedly, "have those fellows of yours keep that madman under control. There's no telling when he'll break out next."

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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Pollock, with Shale, made his way to the "front of the house" where a cab was immediately summoned. Daniels, who remained behind, approached Langdon.

"That's a nice kind of a thing to do, ain't it?" complained he. "Here I bring you into the place and try to put a little business in your way, and then you pile into the backer of the theater and try to put my whole prospect on the fritz."

Langdon looked at the manager.

"I am very sorry, Mr. Daniels," said he, with an effort. "For I had no desire to injure you or your affairs in the least. But your friend Pollock has known me for a long time and what happened just now he brought upon himself. He insulted me deliberately; he called up, out of sheer malice, something which——"

Here the soft hand of Mary touched his arm, the white, tense look which had been once more gathering in his face, died away; his own hand rested upon the girl's, reassuringly, and to Daniels he continued more quietly.

"However, I suppose the reasons behind the matter have no interest for you.

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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I can only repeat that I am sorry the thing happened."

An hour later, Daniels, fuming in his wrecked office, received a call upon the telephone. It was Pollock, and the manager breathed a sigh of relief.

"How are you now?" he questioned.

"Not injured at all except for a few bruises. A bath fixed me up and I'm going right ahead with the day's work." There was a little pause such as a man makes when he is coming to the real point of his remarks. "What has become of Langdon?"

"Last I saw of him," answered the manager, "Miss Page was bathing his face with cold water and getting him in shape to leave the theater."

"I see!" There was that in Pollock's voice which caused Daniels to draw down one corner of his mouth knowingly. "Well, all right; I'll probably see you tomorrow."

When Pollock, in his handsome room at the Plaza, hung up the telephone receiver, there was an ugly look upon his face. To Shale, who sat with a bottle, a syphon of

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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soda, and glasses upon a tray before him, he said:

“That fellow Langdon has been one of my pet aversions for years. I’m rather of the opinion that in the end I’ll be forced to ‘get’ him somehow.”

Shale shot the highly carbonated water from the syphon into a stiff glass of Scotch, with ice. It was plain that since the encounter between Pollock and Langdon, he had been steadyng himself somewhat with drink, and once more he was in the condition in which he had first stepped upon the Covington’s stage.

“Dang’rous man,” said he, after a swallow of the drink. “Dang’rous man. Homicidal tendencies. I shaw it in hish eye. Ought to have shomeshing done to him by the police.”

Pollock sat down at a table and drew some papers toward him. His face was slightly swollen on one side; and a good sized, discolored lump showed over one eye. His movements were somewhat stiff and apparently he found it somewhat painful to carry some of them through. After moodily studying one of the papers for a

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### *OF MARY PAGE*

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few moments, he lifted his glance to Shale.

“This report of Carter’s is bad,” said he. “There seems to be a weakening along the whole line in his district.”

Shale put down his glass, and endeavored to assume a judicial attitude.

“I warned that fellah to be careful,” said he. “I talked t’him like a brother. And now,” with a gesture, “the tide’s rising all around him.”

Pollock looked at the speaker, valuingly, for a moment; then he spoke.

“It seems to me, Shale,” said he, “that you are drinking too much yourself to make your services count very heavily for the manufacturers of the stuff. You recommended Carter to me as a first-rate man—of influence and of force; I counted on your word, and now, here he is, breaking under the weight of the first pressure put on him.”

“Carter’s a first-rate man,” protested Shale. “A firs’-rate man; an’ he’s got the liquor business at heart; he once owned a chain of saloons, an’ made money. Don’t un’stan’ why he should fall down now. Don’t un’stan’ it at all.”

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## *THE STRANGE CASE*

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“The Middle West is slipping!” said Pollock, scowling at the papers before him. “We’ve lost our grip out there, in every rural community; only the bigger cities favor us, and even they are not what they should be. If things continue to drift as they have been doing, the liquor business will soon have a fight on its hands such as it never went through before.”

Shale nodded his full accordance with this, and mixed himself another highball.

“Awful shape!” lamented he. “Awful!” He drank off the liquor and closed his eyes with doleful countenance. “Frightful condition, ain’t it? Country seems to be going t’ the dogs. Prohibition’s getting the bulge; people’s getting sore on booze. Was-a-matter wis’ ‘em?”

Pollock made no answer to this; he had evidently come upon something in one of the papers before him, for his mouth tightened and his glance narrowed. He stole a look at Shale, who still sat with his eyes closed; then he softly opened a drawer in the table and took out another paper which he compared with the one before him. The comparison seemed to clinch some idea

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which he had in his mind. He sat for a few moments, his frowning gaze going from the papers to Shale and back again. Then he spoke:

“Shale!”

There was something in the tone which made that personage, dulled as he was, instantly open his eyes.

“Eh?” said he stupidly.

“Just what money did you put into Carter’s fight?”

The question seemed to arouse Shale; his befuddled faculties fought off the fumes of the liquor as though in an effort to meet an issue of consequence.

“Thirty thousand,” said he, definitely enough. “There was no use trying to fix that matter with less. Thirty thousand good hard dollars—spent to make people see things in their proper light.” There was a pause; then Shale asked curiously, “Why?”

“Suppose you send in an itemized account of the matter for the Association,” said Pollock.

Shale stared, his hard eyes were wide open and amazed.

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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"Itemized account! Ain't that something new?"

"The Association of Liquor Interests is, of course, not the sort of body which inquires too closely into the spending of its money," said Pollock. "As a matter of fact, much of it is spent where it would not be—shall we say, politic?—to follow it."

"I sh'd say so," said Shale as the other was about to go on. "I sh'd say so. I've sunk more money into—"

But Pollock stopped him coldly.

"Certain questions have been asked me of late," said he, "and I'd like to be in a position to answer them readily. So, if you don't mind, let me have your *corrected* figures as soon as you can."

"*Corrected!*" Shale's tones had been quite loud, but now they sank in a marked degree. "What's this, Pollock—a joke?"

"Nothing of the sort," replied the other. "It's straight business. I have, to put it plainly, a couple of sets of figures here which do not agree very well; and unless your corrected version of them is particularly convincing, Shale, why, I mean to go into your spending of the Liquor

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Interests' money rather deeper than usual."

"You don't trust me, eh?" Shale's face wore no very pleasing expression as he looked at Pollock. "After I've done all your dirty work, you're going t' shake me down, are you? I've got t' count up everything—even the pennies I've given t' the blind men." He got up and stood leaning upon the desk. "Well, all I gotta say is that I'm surprised—it's a knock-out. I've seen lots of people get tight across the chest, Pollock, but, by George, I never expected to see you go that way!"

"There has been some seventy odd thousand dollars put out of this headquarters in the last quarter," said Pollock coldly. "You've had the disbursing of the most of it, and I don't see that there's any good reason for indignation, when you are asked what you've done with it."

"Ain't I told you?" demanded Shale querulously. "Ain't I put it down for you?" He pointed to the papers on the table before him. "What more do you want anyhow?"

Pollock laughed. And there was a sneer behind his mirth.

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## ***STRANGE CASE OF MARY PAGE***

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“ Suppose you try again,” he said. “ And *this* time, be a trifle more definite.”

He got up, looking at his watch. “ And now, get out, will you? I want to have an hour’s sleep, and then dress to meet some people at Rector’s.”

“ Right,” said Shale. He, too, got up, taking his hat. Still, he made no move to act on the other’s hint. He stood looking into his hat as though seeking some inspiration from the lining.

Finally, with a deep, whisky-laden sigh, he opened the door and went out, closing it carefully behind him.



**ONCE SHE TURNED AND KISSED HER FINGER-TIPS  
TO HIM.**

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## CHAPTER V

### A RESPITE

THE days following the almost tragic episode at Covington's were full of work for Mary Page. The rehearsals of "Seekers" were almost continuous. The acid-tongued stage director grew more and more exacting with the company. Manuscript in hand, he went striding up and down, driving, pleading, blustering the unready ones with his sarcasms.

Of course Mary, herself, was immune from all this. The man was polite enough with her. Nevertheless, the scathing outbreaks were hard to bear.

"I know just how you feel," said Redfield, after a particularly disagreeable scene between Wells and some unfortunate victim of his impatience. Mary stood at the dramatist's side, her sweet face filled with pain. "But try and hear as little of it as you can. Wells is not half a bad fellow, although it can't be denied that some of

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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his remarks are rather brutal. Just now," and the speaker smiled in a wan sort of way, "he's about fagged out like the rest of us and his nerves resent further call upon them."

"I wish our opening were tonight," said Mary. "We need a performance more than anything else."

"I agree with you, there," nodded the playwright. "We've been hammering at this thing for a month and I think we know as much about it as rehearsals will ever tell us."

Late each afternoon a worn, tired Mary Page would deliver herself to Janet, whose ministering hands prepared a bath and rubbed her until she glowed.

*"Bonne MIRE!* What would we do without the water that is warm!" Janet pursed up her red little mouth and gestured the utter futility of life under such circumstances. "You come home, Mad'moiselle, like the ghost; then *vite!*—in one ten minutes—just one—you have the pink in the cheeks."

Mary snuggled contentedly into the depths of a huge all-upholstered chair.

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### **OF MARY PAGE**

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“ You are a great comfort to me, Janet,” she said. “ I really don’t know what I should do without you.”

“ Mad’moiselle is ver’ good,” nodded she. “ She work, oh, so hard! all day at the theater, and when she come home someone must see that she do not take seek. Is it not?” She put a light scarf about Mary’s white shoulders and stirred the masses of bright hair with her fingers. “ Many people would be disappoint’, Mad’moiselle, if you were not able to play when the grand night comes.”

“ You have been reading the papers, Janet,” smiled Mary.

The little maid laughed.

“ Could one help it, Mad’moiselle! So many are the beautiful things said of you—and with your picture each time.” Here she crossed to a small stand upon which was a box of long-stemmed blooms. “ Mad’moiselle is also remembered by others,” with the privileged manner of long service. “ Each day come the flowers—never once do they fail.”

Mary looked quickly at the roses; she had not noticed them before. A card lying

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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in the midst of the softly tinted petals caught her eyes. With a shadow upon her face she asked:

“Who sent them, Janet?”

With a demure air, as if she had not already ascertained that important fact, Janet took up the card and read it with care:

“Monsieur Philip Langdon, Mad’moiselle.”

The shadow went from Mary Page’s face like magic; she stretched out her round arms.

“Give them to me, Janet,” said she.

The maid, with a gleeful little smile, laid the mass of beautiful roses in the outheld arms. The deep green of the leaves contrasted deliciously with the smooth, pink flesh. And Mary hugged the roses to her breast.

“Oh, they are lovely!” she said.

And the *way* she said it—the blissful little indrawing of the breath which accompanied the words, the bending of the golden head over the blooms, caused the small, wise Janet to nod with an air of really alarming knowledge, and say to herself:

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## OF MARY PAGE

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“ Ah, the ver’ lucky Monsieur Lang-don. She cares not’ing for the flowers—unless *he* sends them.”

Just then the ’phone rang; Janet went to it. After a word or two she turned her head towards her mistress.

“ Monsieur Lang-don,” she announced.

Mary Page sprang up.

“ He is in the office, Mad’moiselle,” said the maid. “ Shall he come up? ”

Mary, a flush warming her face and throat, instinctively gathered the soft, clinging silk of her robe about her.

“ Yes,” she said. “ Let him in when *he* rings, and then come help me dress.”

A few moments later Philip Langdon entered the little sitting-room where Mary Page received her guests.

“ Will Monsieur sit down? ” asked Janet demurely. “ Mad’moiselle will be here, ver’ soon.”

Langdon seated himself, crossing one leg over the other, and clasping his knee with his hands, he looked about. There was that in the room which has such an aloof charm for the bachelor man—that mysterious something which holds his in-

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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terest, but which he never fully understands. Langdon knew this little room very well, every particle of furniture, every rug, every picture were familiar to him; and yet it was filled with this mysterious allusion.

“But I know what it is,” he told himself confidently. “It’s Mary. I sense her touch in everything.”

In this thought Philip Langdon perhaps proved himself a very wise man; or, perhaps again, hidden things had been revealed to him because he was in love. However, there may be no great difference in these two states; for love, it has been said, is itself a kind of wisdom.

When Mary came into the room she was radiant with smiles.

“Oh, Philip, it’s good of you!” she said. “You felt I’d be rather low tonight, didn’t you?”

“Why, I fancied you might,” admitted the young attorney. His glance searched her face with its pink tints and pure outline; the blue eyes whose deeper violet pools were brought out by the overhead light. “But,” he added, after a moment, “I see

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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I've been wrong. You've never been brighter."

She laughed; putting her hands upon his shoulders, she nodded her head gayly.

"It's because you are here," she said. "When I got home an hour or so ago I was depressed enough."

"You are not working too hard?" said Langdon anxiously.

"Not any harder than I should," she answered. But with a charmingly grave little air, "My future as an artist depends upon what I do now, dear."

Langdon was silent. He knew her ambition to succeed was very strong; it was perhaps one of the deepest impulses of her life; and he admired it. So many pretty women were content with their beauty alone. But, still, the struggle in which she was involved had aspects which were not at all to his liking. He voiced one of these when he spoke again.

"Is everything at the theater going all right?"

The girl instinctively knew what was in his mind; a little cloud passed over her face.

"Oh, yes," she said. "To be sure it's

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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a worry and we are all very anxious. Mr. Wells the director, is something of a trial, too; but Mr. Redfield is kind, and that helps a great deal."

"That beast Pollock," said Langdon, a frown upon his face. "Does he ever show himself?"

"Not often," replied Mary. There was something in the way she said this—a slight hesitancy of manner—a trembling of the long lashes, which at once riveted the young man's attention. He caught the girl by both arms, drew her about and looked into her face.

"Mary!" exclaimed he. "Has he been annoying you?"

"Dear Philip," said she, her face a little pale, "you know a girl in my position has more to endure than one whose life is sheltered by a home. I have my way to make; and if there are unpleasant things to be met by the way, I must hurry by them, and forget them as quickly as possible."

Langdon released her, and with his hands tightly clenched, paced up and down the floor.

"The cad!" he exclaimed, his eyes burn-

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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ing. "The hound! I could take him by the throat and choke the life out of him!"

"Philip!" Mary's hand was upon his arm. He paused and looked down into the sweet face in which was that look of fear which he sometimes found there. "I want you to make me a promise," she said. She waited as though she wanted him to speak; but as he did not, she went on: "You must not think of David Pollock, dear. You must not see him; and, above all, no matter what comes or goes, you must not allow your anger to get the better of you." Still he was silent, and she added gently: "I am afraid of something dreadful, Philip. You know the effect rage has upon you. Promise me."

It was impossible to stand out against the pleading in her face; his strong hand covered the small one on his sleeve.

"If you desire it so, Mary, very well. I promise. But it is no easy thing to do. I can only hope," fervently, "that the time will soon pass when such beasts as this man will be privileged to thrust themselves upon you."

She drew his head down and kissed him.

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## *STRANGE CASE OF MARY PAGE*

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“This is only a phase of my life, dear,” she said. “And life seems made of such things. Many splendid women of the stage have been forced through this one, before me.”

But unpleasant as was the shadow of Pollock, as it threw its sinister length across their paths, Mary Page forgot him in the fever of the succeeding days. The scenic equipment of “Seekers” had been sent on to the trial city, Hartford, Conn. Then the company followed in a state of mental staleness alarming to anyone but the experienced.

But, with the tonic of that single performance to brave them, they returned to New York. The great test was before them.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE FIRST NIGHT OF THE “SEEKERS”

COVINGTON'S THEATER was ablaze with exterior lights on the first night. Daniels, in all the pomp and pride of full dress, stood in the lobby and watched the stream of motor-cars deposit their load of brilliantly dressed freight at the door.

“It's a knock-out,” he informed the door-keeper. “They're the right kind of people, the real goods. Diamonds and full dress. Nothing to it!”

The dramatist, Redfield, stood at the back of the orchestra chairs and watched the audience as it flowed in. The press agent of the house, a dapper, alert young man, was at his side.

“The newspapers were curious about this play of yours,” said the publicity man. “And the star also interested them. I never had such a soft thing in my life. I

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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just fed them the stuff and looked confident. And they printed every word of it."

"Press work has its good points," admitted Redfield with a smile, "but it never yet made an audience come to a play it didn't like. And a New York first-night crowd is the flabbiest and most unresponsive in the world. However"—his mouth tightened a little—"I have hopes."

Mary Page was sitting beside Langdon in his runabout—he had called for her early at her hotel—when, for the first time, she saw her own name in blazing incandescents high up over the main entrance to the theater.

"It's like a dream!" she whispered to her companion, clasping her hands rapturously. "I've thought of this night, dear, for years, and wondered if it would ever come and what it would be like when it did. And now that it *is* here, I can't bring myself to believe that it is true!"

"It's true enough," said Langdon in reply. "And before the night is over, you are going to be famous."

He drew the car up before the stage door and helped her out.

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### *OF MARY PAGE*

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“Wear my violets in your first scene,” he begged. “They’ll bring you luck!”

Mary Page smiled up into his face. “Of course I’ll wear your violets, dear boy!”

Then, as he held the door open that she might enter, she added with sweet seriousness, “and, as you sit out there among that great crowd of cold, critical people, Philip, with poor, little me fairly breaking my heart to move them, you’ll say just a wee, small prayer for me, won’t you? Don’t smile, please! Philip, I believe in it! It has helped me wonderfully, many times before.”

Langdon promised, as a matter of course. He held the swinging door open despite the sour looks of the doorman, and watched the girl as she hurried towards her dressing-room.

Once she turned and kissed her finger-tips to him. Then, as she finally disappeared, he allowed the door to swing shut, and made his way towards the front to wait, with high, pulsing heart, for her ordeal.

Janet was waiting for her mistress in the dressing-room. And, at once, she seized

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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upon her with practiced hands. The gowns which *Nora* was to wear hung upon the wall. The mirror above the dressing-table, with its frame of incandescent lights, gleamed like a huge diamond. The rouge pots, boxes of lotion and powder, sticks of cosmetics, and variously colored pencils lay upon their white cloth all ready for use.

While Mary Page was rapidly applying the make-up to her face made necessary by the powerful lights of the modern stage, she could hear the orchestra tuning their instruments. She had plenty of time. Her first scene did not come until well towards the middle of the first act. And the overture had not yet begun.

Nevertheless, she made all haste, filled with that nervous dread which she had been fighting all day. Janet saw the expression of her face reflected in the glass as she was arranging the masses of golden hair.

“It is not jus’ now for Mad’moiselle to become afraid,” she cautioned. “That was for the night at Har’ford.”

“But I know what New York first-night audiences are!” said Mary, as she slipped off her dressing gown and vanished, with a

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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flash of white shoulder, in to the gown which the maid held ready for her.

“But does not Mad’moiselle also know *Nora*?” asked the wily Janet, her head on one side in her wren-like manner.

Mary Page’s eyes flashed as she stood looking at herself in the glass, the busy fingers of Janet all the while buttoning, hooking, and smoothing the gown into shape.

“You are right, Janet,” she said. “That I know *Nora* counts for more than all the rest. And,” with a delicious little out-thrust of the chin, “I’ll make my audience know her, too.”

The orchestra was half finished by the time she was ready. With the idea that it might help her to regain perfect control of herself, Mary Page stepped out into the passage-way that ran by her dressing-room. With a start of dismay, she saw David Pollock, standing only a few doors away in conversation with the stage director. Just as she was about to regain the safety of her own room, he looked up and saw her.

He looked the last expression of sartorial

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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elegance, but his handsome face was flushed and his manner that of a man who had been drinking. At sight of her he held out both hands in an exaggerated gesture of welcome.

"Here she is!" exclaimed he. "Here she is now!" He seized her hand in both his own. "The most talented little actress on the New York stage."

Mary shrank back, drawing her hand away instinctively. He laughed rather loudly. It was plain that drink had disturbed his polished poise.

"She don't fancy praise!" exclaimed he. "Now here's a *rare avis*, Wells. She is an actress, and yet has no use for flattery."

"I fear I may be late. I'm not quite ready," said the girl hurriedly. "Please pardon me, Mr. Pollock."

He snapped his fingers contemptuously; bending forward in a confidential way, he spoke with low-voiced assurance.

"Don't ever trouble yourself with things like that in this house. I'll see to that—do you understand?" Again he attempted to take her hand, but she drew away once more. "I say," said he, "do you know



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*OF MARY PAGE*

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you're going to take this crowd by storm, tonight?"

"The play will succeed," said Mary. "And I can only hope that I—"

"To the devil with the play!" he interrupted. "It's *you*, I tell you!" His face came nearer to her and its expression was one which caused Mary to go suddenly cold. "Do you think Redfield's rubbish is what's opened this theater tonight? Do you think all that crowd out there came to listen to his sayings about truth and life and such stuff. Not for a minute. The house would have stayed shut, the audience would have stuck to its dansants, its motor-cars, and its restaurants if there had been no Mary Page. *You* are the attraction, I tell you—and you only!"

Mary was trembling—just why she did not know; and her eyes went pleadingly to Wells. The latter took out his watch.

"The curtain will go up in two minutes," said he.

"Oh," The girl was appalled. "I must go at once. I am really very late."

"We can hold the curtain long enough for you to have a glass of wine in Daniels'

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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office," said Pollock. Her face went pale at the suggestion and her hands went up in a gesture of repulsion. "Just one," he insisted. "One little glass of champagne to your success."

"No, no. Please, Mr. Pollock, I must go."

The girl rushed by him and the door of her dressing-room closed upon her. For a moment Pollock looked blank; then an ugly sneer disguised his face.

"A bit offish, isn't she?" said he to Wells. Then, with a laugh, "Oh, well, I've seen them something like that before. We'll overcome these little mannerisms of hers, later."

The curtain was already up when she reached the wings. The "set," upheld by the securely placed braces, threw uncouth shadows behind it. Brilliant rays of light trickled through at crevices and at partly opened doors. The stage manager, manuscript in hand, stood behind one of these; the voices of the actors, unnaturally loud, were speaking the familiar lines; those of the cast not in the scene being enacted, stood silent and serious looking, listening,

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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or conning their parts. The stage crew, alert and competent, stood at their allotted places.

“The house is packed to the roof,” the tightly corsetted lady told Mary in a whisper. “And they are as still as death. I think that’s a good sign, don’t you?”

Mary peeped at the “House,” which stretched away in row upon row of beautifully dressed women and men in the stiff conventional black and white to which they are condemned. The upper floors towered high and immense, the hundreds of intent faces turned toward the stage.

“I think they are wonderful!” she whispered to the stout woman. “They seem to *want* to be interested.”

In his customary end seat on the center aisle, his hair even more disordered than ever, sat Marshall, critic of the *Morning News*; near him was Calvert of *The Star*, whose quips and small arm fire were more dreaded by managers than the other’s great guns. A little to one side of these celebrities was Philip Langdon; his face was rather pale, his manner strained; and

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## **THE STRANGE CASE**

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Mary's heart gave a little leap as she saw him.

"Poor fellow!" she murmured, a mist suddenly dimming her vision. "How he is suffering. He's afraid I may break down." Then the beautiful eyes cleared, and the rosy lips smiled. "But I will not, dear Philip," mentally, as though seeking to make the thought carry to where he sat so forlornly. "I will be brave, I will win a victory, if only for your sake!"

But young Langdon in his chair in the orchestra was not comforted by this telegraphic message; he saw the rows of cold faces about him; he noted the incredulous attitudes of many. And the lines of the play, to his supersensitive ear, seemed strained and unreal; the little mannerisms of the players appeared vapid, even ridiculous. Then, too, he caught sight of David Pollock in a stage box with some friends, handsome, dressed with faultless taste, but with his suave personality plainly marred. The countenance of young Langdon hardened.

"Drunk!" said he to himself. "A beast, to be sure! It's only outward show which

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## OF MARY PAGE

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lifts him above the ruck of the Broadway cad."

"*Seekers*" grew steadily before the audience; the ground work was laid in a few telling scenes; and then Mary Page, as *Nora*, appeared for the first time. A wave of applause went up, a wave of recognition for past merit. Made ostentatious by liquor, Pollock leaned over the rail of his box and applauded until his companions drew him back.

The eyes of the audience went to his box, surprised; Langdon's heart stood still for a moment in fear of the effect the incident might have upon Mary. But in this he was shredding his nerves uselessly, for, upon the stage, Mary Page saw no one except the characters. Indeed, for the time she ceased to exist; in her place stood the girl *Nora*, strangely circumstanced, alone, brought to the verge by the malice of those who should have helped her.

With the sureness of touch only possessed by the true artist, and displaying heretofore unsounded depths of feeling, Mary limned this brave hapless creature, so crushed by rigid convention and stupid

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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law. So appealing was the portrait, so wonderfully did she indicate the girl's capacity for suffering that, when, after this first scene, she left the office of her employers, in silence and with bowed head, there was a quick thrilling rush of applause.

With a gasp of almost rapture, Langdon said, unconscious that he spoke his thought aloud:

“Heavens! If she can hold that pace, she'll be wonderful!”

His neighbor, a broad-faced little man, with broad shining eyeglasses, turned upon him.

“She *will* keep it up,” said he. “I saw this girl last season in ‘The Voice of Time,’ and she was amazing!”

Scene after scene, act after act followed; the play mounted steadily. Mary rose with it, from height to height until at length the final curtain fell upon a climax that was as overpowering as it was inexorable.

Then it began to rise and fall continuously while the great, long rolls of applause went up from the delighted house. Through the noise, Calvert of the *Star*,

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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made his way to the side of the shock-headed Marshall.

“Who gets the credit,” asked he with a laugh, “the dramatist or the star?”

“In this case—both,” replied the blunt sage of the *Morning News*. “Both have been promising for some time past—and now they have kept their promises. Tomorrow morning my readers are going to receive the shock of their lives. I mean to speak of this performance in terms of unqualified praise.”

Mary Page, flushed, breathless, and smiling, bowed time after time, and with each descent of the great curtain her eager eyes searched for Langdon. But he was not to be seen; the audience was upon its feet and their waving arms and agitated bodies concealed him from her view.

However, there was a face which she did see—the flushed one of David Pollock. With eyes flaming with excitement and intoxication he stood at the edge of his box in full view of the house, applauding with every demonstration of triumph. As the curtain was lifted for the last time she caught a gesture from him and a gleam of

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## *STRANGE CASE OF MARY PAGE*

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his fine teeth as he smiled; and as she hurried away to her dressing room the glow of victory was chilled by a sense of fear.

The audience, after a speech by Redfield, gradually left the theater; the lights were extinguished in the auditorium, and on the stage, the crew "struck" the set. Redfield and Wells had just gone out, deep in some prospective strengthenings for the second performance; and Daniels was speaking a few last words to the stage carpenter when Pollock entered by the back door.

## CHAPTER VII

### POLLOCK LOSES HIS HEAD

“HELLO!” said the manager. “Thought that crowd you were with had carried you away with them.”

“I got rid of them,” answered Pollock shortly.

It was plain that he had drunk still more since the manager had seen him earlier in the evening. The flush in his face was deeper. His eyes burned feverishly. Taking Daniels aside, he said:

“Before I go, I want a word or two with Mary Page.”

“Oh, save your congratulations until morning,” said Daniels uneasily. “They’ll sound better.”

“Congratulations the devil!” Pollock’s voice was sharp and lifted. “Is her maid with her?” he asked in a modified tone.

“Yes, I believe she is.”

“Get her out,” commanded Pollock. “I don’t want her hanging round.”

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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Daniels, with a decidedly uncomfortable look, spoke a word in the ear of the carpenter. The man went to the 'Star' dressing-room and knocked. Janet opened the door ever so little, and looked out.

"What is it, please?" she asked.

The carpenter indicated Daniels. Wonderingly, the maid came out and approached the manager. She saw Pollock, and a wrinkle of displeasure appeared between her dark little brows.

What Daniels said to Janet was uttered in a low voice. She hesitated. Then, as though not understanding, followed him onto the darkened stage.

Instantly, Pollock went to the door of Mary Page's dressing-room and knocked in his turn.

"Who is it, please?" came Mary's clear voice.

The man did not answer; instead, he turned the knob and entered. Mary sat before the mirror which faced the door. She saw the man in its polished surface, drew her dressing-gown about her with hurried hands, and arose. Turning swiftly, she regarded him with frightened eyes.

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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“Mr. Pollock!”

“Pardon me!” He leered at her drunkenly. “Came in for just a word with you.”

The girl’s hands clutched the edges of the dressing-table; her face was deathly white. The hastily fastened dressing-gown had fallen away from her throat; the fair white skin gleamed under the lights; and Pollock, as his hungry eyes devoured her beauty, was amazed to see a livid, angry mark, deep red and startling, appear, as though by magic, upon the snow of her breast.

“My God!” cried he. “What’s that?”

The girl clutched the gown across her breast with one tense hand; her wide open eyes were strange with some new terror.

“Mr. Pollock!” she gestured toward the door. “Please go!”

The man recovered from the momentary shock which the sight had given him; once more he leered at her.

“Oh, no,” said he. “I guess not, Mary.”

“Please!” Her voice shook; she trembled from head to foot.

“I guess not,” said Pollock. “What do

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## **THE STRANGE CASE**

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you take me for? You've got what you wanted—a star part on Broadway. Your success is assured—and my money paid for it." The girl shrank away from the hand which reached toward her. "My money paid for it—understand? I bought it for you. And now I'm here to ask for my pay."

With wide, non-understanding eyes, Mary Page continued to stare at him; her pale lips moved, but made no sound. Then there came a light tapping upon the door. Janet's voice said softly:

"Mad'moiselle!"

Like a flash Pollock turned the key in the door.

"Quick now," said he to Mary, "your answer, before I let her in." Mutely, rigid with terror, the girl continued to stare at him. With an oath he gripped her by the shoulders. "What the devil kind of a game is this you're playing on me?" he demanded. "Eh? Do you take me for a fool? I've bought you success—I've bought you. You've had your turn—now I want mine."

His arms went about her; he bent for

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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ward about to press a kiss upon her lips. But with a sudden strength she strove to break away; her scream of fear rang thrillingly through the room.

A brutal hand went over her mouth; the face of the man was close to hers. Outside the door Janet beat upon the panels; her outcries joined with Mary's. And then came the sudden rush of feet; the door shook under a powerful hand; then it gave way with a crash, and Philip Langdon sprang into the room.

As the door of her dressing-room fell inward, Mary Page gave a cry of joy. Then Philip Langdon held Pollock in his stalwart grip, had torn him from her and dashed him against the wall.

In the shattered doorway stood Janet, and her shrill screams filled the theater; the stage hands rushed to the scene; then members of the cast, in all stages of dress and all conditions of alarm, emerged from their rooms to learn the cause of the outcries.

With lips drawn back from his teeth like an enraged beast, Pollock drew a pearl-handled revolver. But as he was lifting it, Mary snatched it from his hand; and as

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## **THE STRANGE CASE**

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the two men clashed like tigers, she concealed the weapon in her handbag. As the stage crew rushed to separate the fighting men, a small stand holding a burning alcohol lamp was overturned; like a flash the draperies of Mary Page had ignited and the flames began to rise up about her.

Langdon was the first to see this; he and his antagonist had just been separated, and the young attorney leaped forward; with a jerk he tore down some hangings, flung them about Mary and extinguished the blaze.

Tenderly he placed her upon a couch, Janet and the women of the company gathered about her.

“Are you hurt?” asked the young man fearfully.

But she shook her head and smiled, oh, so faintly, up at him.

“No,” she said. “It had not time to burn me.”

Langdon kissed her tenderly upon one pale cheek; and then left her to the care of the women. Outside the dressing-room he saw Daniels and some of the stage hands, but Pollock had disappeared. With an

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### *OF MARY PAGE*

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expression of dull resentment in his heavy face, Daniels approached the young attorney.

"Look here," said he. "This is the second time you've done this kind of a thing in this house! What do you think——"

"Wait!" The hand of the other was laid heavily upon his chest and the tones were cold and cutting. "I don't think it becomes you to assume that manner after what has happened."

"I'll give you to understand——" Daniels began to bluster. But he was interrupted once more.

"I don't know just how much you've had to do with this matter," said Langdon sternly. "But I do know this," his lip curling, "that it was enough to disagree in a very marked manner with your present attitude of virtue. And another thing: I wouldn't talk too much if I were you; otherwise the newspapers may get hold of the matter and I fancy that would be somewhat unpleasant."

Daniels blustered for a few moments, but finally it was plain that what Langdon had said had made its impression; his shifty

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## *THE STRANGE CASE*

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eyes grew more evasive than ever; his heavy face was pasty with anxiety.

"Well," said he, "all I've got to say to you is—I'm done with you; you'll get no more of my business. Not a scrap!"

He went away, and Langdon waited outside Mary's door. In a little while she had recovered sufficiently to dress, and then, still a little pale, she came out.

"I'll get a taxi," said Langdon anxiously. "You'll be more comfortable in it than in my car."

"No, no," said Mary. "You must take me home, Philip." Then in a whisper too low for the others to hear: "You *must* dear; I can't do without you, now."

The strong hand of the young man pressed her own understandingly.

"Very well," said he.

At the stage door was Langdon's run-about; he handed Mary in, tucked her up in the warm robes and then proceeded to "crank" his engine. Some little distance away was a large limousine; its sides gleaming in the lights, and beside this stood David Pollock and his friend Shale.

"Well, now that your little trick has



"MY GOD!" CRIED HE, "WHAT'S THAT?"

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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been trumped," said Shale, "you'll not have another chance to speak to her tonight. He's going home with her."

Pollock's hands clenched, his eyes burned venomously.

"That fellow will get all that's coming to him, before long," said he. "He's interfered with me just about once too often."

Here the engine of Langdon's car started up with noisy reverberations; the young man got in and with Mary at his side, went bowling down the street.

"They're off," said Shale.

"Yes," said Pollock, with an angry oath, "and I'm after them." As the engine of his big limousine began to hum, Pollock leaped in and took the wheel, Shale followed. Pollock released the power and away they shot after the runabout.

"I don't see what chasing them up in this way is going to get you," said Shale, his hard eyes going in a sidelong look at the distorted face above the wheel and the trembling hands clutching its rim.

"You don't, eh?" snarled Pollock. "Well, I'll show you."

In spite of the throngs crossing the

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## *THE STRANGE CASE*

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streets, for it was the hour in which the theater district is most congested, Pollock, unheeding, drove his powerful car along at high speed, his horn braying arrogantly and deaf to the warning whistles of traffic policemen.

"You'll show me the way to jail if you keep this up," said Shale. "Your number has been taken by at least a half dozen coppers."

But Pollock made no reply; far ahead he saw the little runabout and his fine teeth clicked as he gave the car more speed.

"What the devil's wrong with this machine?" he growled. "Six cylinders and can't catch a flivver like that!"

The reason for this was that Langdon, some little time before, had heard the whistles of the policemen and looking back to see if he was meant, had noted the speeding limousine and saw Pollock clutching the wheel. Not understanding what the man's intentions were and desirous of saving Mary the sight of him in her present condition, he threw on the speed and tried to outdistance his pursuer.

But with the splendid engine of the

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## OF MARY PAGE

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linousine now speeding at almost its utmost, the little car had no chance to hold its lead. Pollock began closing the gap as though the runabout were standing still. With his white teeth showing in an unpleasant smile, he said to Shale:

“How many collisions on the road do you think are the result of accident?”

Startled by his tone, Shale turned swiftly.

“What do you mean?” demanded he.

“I was thinking that a good many of them may be ‘arranged.’ The teeth clicked as he said this. “It’s rather an idea,” he added. “And when I hit that fellow ahead there, I’m going to turn him end over end.”

Despite the protests of Shale, the drink-maddened man headed the heavy car at the rear off side of the fragile runabout; and just as he was about to smash into it, he heard a sharp voice say:

“Hello, you! Shut that thing off! You and me’s going to have a little talk.”

A motor-cycle policeman was beside the car, a square chin shoved out pugnaciously, and a coldly inquiring eye on Pollock. Instinctively, drunk as he was, the man did as he was bidden; the car slowed down and

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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finally came to a stop; and Pollock began an altercation with the policeman.

Meanwhile the runabout speeded away; they had entered Central Park by this, and Mary looked about surprisedly.

"Why, Philip," she said. "See where we are."

He desired to avoid telling her his reason for driving so far out of the way, so he said:

"I thought the cool air might do you good."

"You are very thoughtful, Philip," said the girl, smiling at him with sweet gratitude. "And it really has made me feel wonderfully better."

With a swift rush of something like reverence, Langdon leaned toward her and touched her cheek with his lips. For an instant his eyes were taken from the track ahead; and in that space, a bedraggled, trampish looking man lurched drunkenly across their path. Though Langdon did not see him, Mary did; her cry of dismay caused the strong hands to tug at the wheel instinctively; the car swerved, but the



"I'LL GET A TAXI," SAID LANGDON.

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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wheel guard struck the man and he was thrown to the road.

Quickly Langdon threw off the power and set the brake. The car came to a stop and both he and Mary jumped out and hurried back to the prostrate man.

"It's the drink, I fancy, as much as anything else," said Langdon, after a brief examination. "But we must get him out of the track of other cars."

The young attorney lifted the man in his strong arms, carried him to one side, and laid him down beneath a tree.

"He may be more seriously hurt than you think," said Mary anxiously. "Had we not better try and get help?"

"Perhaps it would be as well," said Langdon, who was once more bending over the man. With this, Mary turned toward the road, thinking to intercept a passing car. None was in sight though she looked up and down; then the horn of the run-about occurred to her; going to it, she set its strident voice shrieking for aid.

She waited a moment; then the horn sounded again and again. But as no answer came from the depths of the de-

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## *THE STRANGE CASE*

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serted park, a fresh idea came to the anxious girl. David Pollock's pearl-handled revolver which was in her bag, came to her mind. The bag was upon the car seat; quickly she opened it and drew the shining weapon out.

Without noticing that a limousine had crept almost noiselessly around a bend in the road, the girl raised the revolver to fire in the air. The machine stopped a dozen paces from her and Pollock leaped to the ground. At sight of him Mary Page became transfixed with terror. She did not see Langdon running to her side, she did not see Shale on the front seat of the linousine, she did not hear the clatter of hoofs as a mounted policeman galloped up, attracted by the continuous blasts of the horn. Her strength began to leave her; slowly the muzzle of the tight-held revolver lowered; it was now upon a level with David Pollock's eyes, and with a gasp of sobering fear the man saw the black tube grinning at him.

The girl's finger was upon the trigger, her eyes were closed, her pale lips were murmuring a soundless prayer. Then the

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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policeman rushed his horse between the two. James Pollock shrank back with a gesture of terror; the weapon fell from Mary's nerveless hand, and lay glittering and deadly in the dust of the road.

As the revolver fell from the hand of Mary Page the policeman leaped from his horse and stood looking from one to the other.

“Hello!” said he. “What’s wrong here?”

Pollock, both because of the shock he had received and the liquor he had drunk, seemed unable to formulate an answer. Langdon, however, had sensed what Mary’s intentions had been with the revolver. And so, with his arm about the drooping girl, he explained the situation to the policeman. After he had finished, the latter glanced at Pollock.

“Is that right?” he asked.

“I suppose so,” said Pollock sullenly. “I heard the horn going, and drove up to see what the trouble was.”

There was a pause. The policeman was apparently far from being convinced. But finally, he said:

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## ***STRANGE CASE OF MARY PAGE***

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“Well, I guess it’s all right. But cut out these gun plays on the road in the future, Miss. They don’t look quite the thing.”

Then he took Langdon’s name and address, pressed Pollock’s car into service for the removal of the drunken tramp, who protested vigorously that he had no need of doctors.

When they had all gone, Langdon helped Mary Page into the runabout once more, and drove swiftly to her hotel.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A RELUCTANT GUEST

MARY PAGE was strong of constitution. Her powers of recuperation were marked. During the night and the following day, she threw off the results of this double shock, and the second performance of the "Seekers," to a house crowded to the doors, saw her enact the character of *Nora* even better than before. Langdon was again in the audience, even more anxious than on the evening of the opening. As he watched her, a sense of relief came over him.

"She's all right," he told himself. "No need to worry. Between the doctor and Janet, she's recovered wonderfully."

How much the enthusiasm of the newspapers had to do with Mary's quick reaction is not known, but that it had some we may be sure. There had not been a more ready nor cordial reception to any drama in years than that given "Seekers";

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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no actress in half a decade had come into the fame achieved in one night by Mary Page.

But though Mary was full of joy over the consummation of all her hopes, in the background was a lurking shadow—the fear of Dave Pollock.

“Have you seen anything of him since the other night?” Langdon asked her when the girl mentioned the man to him.

She shook her head.

“No,” she said. “And I don’t think he has been about the theater.”

However, in this Mary was mistaken; for Pollock had visited the office of the Covington only that afternoon. Manager Daniels looked up from his desk as the man entered, and the expression upon his face was far from welcoming.

“Well,” said Pollock, as he sat down, placing his hat and stick upon an end of the desk, “What’s new?”

Daniels took a slip of paper from a pigeon hole and placed it before him.

“A man from *Current Topics* dropped in today; this,” tapping the slip of paper,

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## OF MARY PAGE

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“ is a memorandum showing that I bought six hundred dollars’ worth of space in his paper.”

Pollock, handsome and debonaire as ever, groomed to a nicety and with none of the manner which drink placed upon him, glanced carelessly at the paper.

“ Well, what of it?” he asked.

“ Nothing,” said Daniels stolidly. “ Only blackmail, that’s all. The fellow had got wind, somehow, of what happened after the show on the opening night; and he hinted pretty plainly that it would make a smashing story for his paper. It took the six hundred to shut him up.”

If the manager expected Pollock to display agitation at this, he was disappointed; the man only showed his handsome teeth in a smile and drummed upon the desk edge with his polished nails.

“ Oh, that will be all right,” said he cheerfully. “ They were just squeezing you a little, that’s all. The proprietor of *Current Topics* is a friend of mine; I’ll have a chat with him, and see that it doesn’t happen again.”

“ Well, all right,” said Daniels; “ but,”

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ruefully, "that won't get me back the six hundred."

Pollock sat for a few moments in silence; then he shifted his position so that he would face Daniels directly.

"I say," spoke he. "I'm devilish put out by that affair of the dressing-room."

Daniels grunted.

"You ought to be," commented he. "You handled it like a stevedore."

"As I've said more than once to Shale," nodded Pollock in agreement, "selling liquor and drinking it are two different propositions. I had taken more than I was aware of that night."

"You had one rail under," stated the manager candidly.

Again there was a short silence, and again it was Pollock who broke it.

"It seems to me," said he, "that I ought to do something to make amends for that matter. What do you say," and he looked at the other questioningly, "to a little supper, with plenty of champ on ice?"

"To Miss Page?"

"Yes, and some others."

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## OF MARY PAGE

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"She never drinks anything," said Daniels, "and I've noticed that she don't even like the idea of it."

"Oh, that's only a pose," said Pollock. "I've known her for some years and I think my judgment of her is better than yours. Get her in the right mood and she'll show plenty of pepper."

"Maybe you're right," said Daniels. "But I think not. She'll turn the proposition down."

"Not if you put it to her in the right way. Don't mention my name. Let her think for a time that it's your party. I'll drop in later and then it can be explained." Pollock took out a slim note-book and ruffled its pages. "I've spoken to Falconi already," said he. "He's to have a private room for Thursday night and places for ten." Replacing the book in his pocket, he added: "Now, the rest of it is up to you."

"Falconi's, eh?" Daniels bent his thick brows at the name of this famous resort. For a moment it seemed as though he were suspicious of something which did not appear upon the surface of Pollock's proposition and was about to ask a question. But

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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he did not. For Daniels, owing his rise in the theatrical world to the wine agent, knew that his fall could be brought about with the same celerity if the other so desired it. And he was not the man to imperil his own interests if it could be avoided. "All right," said he. "I'll see what I can do."

The next day at the matinée, Daniels spoke to Mary.

"Now that you've hit them so hard," said he, "I suppose you'll have to keep after them and make it a regular knock-out. There's a lot of people want to meet you—people of the swell bunch, and I'd like to fix it up."

Since the night of the scene in her dressing-room, Mary had avoided Daniels as much as possible. However, he was the manager, and could not be ignored completely no matter how much she distrusted him. So she replied:

"I'm really very sorry, Mr. Daniels, but I can hardly—"

But he interrupted her.

"Oh, now, look here," said he, gesturing hastily with his heavy hands. "That ain't

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### *OF MARY PAGE*

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no way to look at things. Here you've scored a hit; you've won a big public, and they're interested. It won't do to turn 'em down. You must do the social thing, you see. Now that you've caught these kind of people, you must do something to hold them. Ain't that so? It's for the good of the house—for the good of the play and—for your own good."

Mary realized that the man spoke the truth in this regard. An artist whose appeal to the public is direct, must not stand aloof. Work alone does not always insure sustained popularity. Personal contact is called for—the human touch.

Daniels' shifty eyes watched her closely. From her expression, he cunningly gathered what was passing in her mind. So he continued insistently:

"Lots of requests for a chance to meet you have been coming in from people of class. Maybe you got some of them yourself."

She acknowledged this, and he went on triumphantly:

"There, do you see? That's the way it always is." He rubbed his hands together

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## *STRANGE CASE OF MARY PAGE*

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as though very well pleased. "Now, listen," he said. "There is to be a little supper party to-morrow night. Very quiet, with a lot of class. Society people, writing people, artistic people—all that sort of thing. I'll have a car to take you 'round."

"To-morrow night? Why, I already have—"

Again he interrupted her.

"We'll only keep you an hour or so. You can take up any other engagement afterwards."

Mary Page thought rapidly. What her manager was asking was not at all an unusual thing. Indeed, it was only what might reasonably be required of her. "Very well, Mr. Daniels," she said after a moment's hesitation, "I will accept."

"Fine!" said Daniels. "Falconi's is the place. Your friends can pick you up there after our little affair is over."

## CHAPTER IX

### THE DINNER AT FALCONI'S

LANGDON had gone to Boston that morning on some business, expecting to return the following evening. He had arranged to meet Mary Page at her hotel after the play and go with her to their favorite little French restaurant. So before she left for the theater on the appointed night, she wrote a little note of explanation begging Langdon to call for her at Falconi's.

"When Mr. Langdon calls give this to him, Miss Garland, please," she said to the girl at the desk.

As he had promised, Daniels had a car at the stage door after the last curtain had fallen on "Seekers"; and when he had helped her in they speeded away to the place where the supper party was to be held.

Falconi's was a restaurant of startling effects. In entering one passed through a sober sort of corridor with neutral colored decorations and subdued lights. Then, sud-

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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denly, you turned a sharp angle and the great restaurant burst upon you, gorgeous, flashing, brilliant with the night life of Broadway.

“Fine, isn’t it?” said Daniels as Mary paused at sight of this unexpected magnificence and gave a little exclamation of amazement. “Must have been planned by a stage manager. But,” with a nod and a smile, “we’re not going to stop here. Our affair is to be held in a private room on the floor above.”

The elevator took them to the next floor; a dapper, bowing Italian threw open a door and the two entered. Instantly the half score persons in the room, men and women, were upon their feet; a babble of voices went up; outstretched hands encircled Mary; and she found herself looking into a ring of flushed, hilarious faces; Daniels caught her expression and whispered reassuringly.

“It’s all right. They’re glad to see you, that’s all. Been waiting patiently, I guess.”

With a showman-like flourish, he presented his star; the enthusiastic speeches of the guests fell about Mary like spray; they

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## OF MARY PAGE

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all seemed to talk at once; she was bewildered as to how to reply. The women were brilliantly dressed; beautiful of face and charming of figure; the men were groomed perfectly; assured of manner, and very much at their ease. Indeed, and this was a thing which Mary felt unconsciously, there was a great deal too much ease displayed by everyone.

A man held Mary's hand just a breath too long.

"I had the good fortune to be at your first night, Miss Page," said he, his bold eyes looking into hers. "You were amazingly clever."

"Clever!" A bald, elderly man with a red face and a glass in one eye ejaculated this. "Why, she was meteor! In forty years of first nights, I never saw so brilliant a flight across the dramatic sky."

"My dear," spoke one of the women, "you must be ready to drop from sheer delight. Your success was wonderful."

"Nora was gorgeous as you played her," said another. "And I never want to see another actress in the part. But, tell me, beseechingly, "who does your hair? Your

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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coiffure in the last act was thrilling. I've sent my maid to the theater twice to study it; but she failed absolutely."

They were not at all the sort of people whom Mary had in her mind when she accepted Daniels' invitation. As she looked about among the men she saw the social lot represented by a few, dull-eyed, dissipated-looking wasters; but there were none of the artistic or writing set of whom the manager had mentioned. As for the women, her first glance had filled the girl with apprehension; and that one glance, if she had been more experienced with life, would have told her things of them which months of acquaintance would not do.

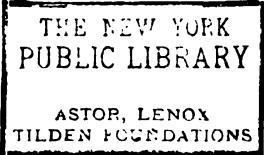
Daniels, from the first moment of their entrance, had watched her face with anxious eye. He saw that it would not do to give her time to think, so he silently signaled to the waiters; the chairs were drawn back and the party seated themselves at a beautifully decorated table.

The bald man with the one eyeglass sat at Mary's right; and he gazed at the thin-stemmed glass before him with nodding satisfaction.



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AFTER THE LAST CURTAIN HAD FALLEN ON "SEEKERS" SHE  
WAS READY.



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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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“The cocktail,” said he, “is as necessary a thing as a constitution.” Lifting the glass he added: “I’ll drink your greater fame and increasing fortune with you, Miss Page.” He sipped at the misty, golden liquid, and then paused. “You’ll not drink with me?” with an assumption of humorous reproach, seeing Mary had not touched the glass which a waiter had placed at her hand.

“Thank you, no. I don’t care for such things.”

A chorus of reproach went up; all were laughing, some with incredulous amazement, others with thinly veiled mockery.

“A sip,” said a young man whose speech wavered and whose gaze was already uncertain. “Just a sip, Miss Page, to prove you’re a good fellow.”

“Not too fast, Sherwood,” spoke Daniels disapprovingly. “Miss Page has had a grilling performance and is not settled enough for cocktails. Just wait a bit.”

As she looked at the people about the table, Mary was conscious of an almost frantic desire to leap up and flee from the place, but, with an effort of will, she fought this back and sat, a little pale, but chatting quite

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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calmly, and smilingly answering the remarks of those who were nearer neighbors.

The affair progressed for a while; the champagne bottles which appeared upon the table almost at once, were replaced constantly; the flushed faces of the drinkers grew still more flushed, their eyes sparkled, their laughter grew high and continuous.

“ You are being asked for, sir, in the next room.”

The man indicated a communicating doorway. Daniels at once arose and mumbled some words of apology; then he crossed and entered the adjoining apartment. It was just such another as the one he had left.

Directly opposite stood Pollock, his hand upon the knob of another door and in conversation with Shale. Pollock was immaculately attired; but the sharp glance of Daniels at once detected that he had been drinking.

“ Hello! ” said the wine agent as he saw the manager. “ You got my message, did you? ”

“ Just a minute ago,” said Daniels.

Pollock looked at Shale.

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## OF MARY PAGE

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“We’ll get this thing finished up tomorrow,” said he. “Nothing can be done tonight.”

Shale bit at his nails, and frowned gloomily.

“It’s a pretty tough proposition,” he said. “Pretty tough.”

“Well, whose fault is it?” said Pollock. Then impatiently: “I’ve got a matter on for tonight; and, another thing, it’s not convenient to have you appearing suddenly, this way.”

“Your man told me you were here, and I thought it only fair to——”

“I’ll see you tomorrow,” said Pollock, with finality. “So run away like a good fellow, will you?”

“All right,” said Shale. “What time?”

“In the afternoon.”

Shale nodded to Daniels as Pollock opened the door; then he left the room and hurried down the hall; the elevator gate slid aside for him, he entered and shot downward. Pollock then shut the door.

“I wanted a little word with you,” said he to Daniels. He went to a table which held a brandy bottle and poured himself out

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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a drink while the manager watched him from under moody brows.

"I saw you come in with her," said the wine agent. "You've done very well." Then with a nod toward the next room. "How are things in there?"

"All right," said Daniels. "Only that gang is rather swift. They scared her a little." Then inquiringly: "When do you mean to show yourself?"

Pollock tossed off the brandy and then smiled in his peculiarly disagreeable way at the manager.

"I don't mean to," said he.

There was something in the smile which caused Daniels to look at him distrustfully.

"You don't mean you've given up this plan of yours?" said he.

"Hardly," laughed Pollock, and the laugh was even more disagreeable than the smile. "I've only changed it a trifle, that's all." He looked at Daniels for a moment and then added: "Instead of going there to her, I'm going to have her come here to me."

"What!" In an instant Daniels caught the other's meaning. "Are you going to

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**OF MARY PAGE**

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try that thing again! Do you want to go to jail?"

"I want you to do as I tell you," said Pollock, his eyes glinting wickedly. "See that the girl gets the proper share of the champagne. Then tell her quietly that someone is in this room who wants to see her."

"I'll not do it!" Daniels gestured widely. "I'll not do it. You're drunk, Pollock, and I know what you are when you're that way. If I'm caught in a thing like this, my chance in the show business is gone."

"Your chance is gone if you don't do what I say," said Pollock. "I made you. I took you out of the gutter, and—"

"I'll not have a hand in it!" almost screeched Daniels. "It don't make any difference what you do or don't do. I'm going to keep out."

Pollock with an ugly oath, suddenly struck the manager a violent blow in the face; a red welt showed where the blow had fallen; Daniels put his hand to it and stood staring silently into the face of the other, fear and fury mingled in his eyes. Then without a word he threw open the hall door and started from the room just as the ele-

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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vator stopped at the other end of the corridor and Philip Langdon got out.

Before Daniels had taken a half dozen steps, Pollock was upon him; at sight of the two men Langdon paused and stood looking toward them fixedly.

“Look here,” said Pollock, striving to control the madness which was leaping in his blood. “Do you intend to be an out-and-out fool?”

“You struck me,” said Daniels in a low voice, and Langdon, as he looked, saw the dark red mark upon the man’s face.

“You’ll run no risks,” said Pollock, disregarding the other’s words. He pointed to the hall door of the supper-room from behind which came the sound of laughter and the clink of glasses. “All you’ve got to do is to see that the girl gets enough to drink. You’ll be taking no chances, I tell you. Then just whisper to her,” and now he pointed toward the door from which they had emerged into the hall, “that Langdon’s in there waiting for her. That will be all.”

At these words the face of Philip Langdon grew dark with fury; with one hand going

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### *OF MARY PAGE*

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toward his pocket and his jaw set, he stepped toward the two; then he paused, seemed to reconsider and halted. Pollock and Daniels were so engrossed and wrought up that they did not see the young man, though he stood not more than a dozen paces away. He gave a quick glance around; a door stood partly open almost at his elbow, and with a soft side step he had vanished.

“ You’ll not be known in the matter, whatever happens,” Pollock once more assured the manager. “ Not a soul will know—”

“ You struck me,” said Daniels in the same low, toneless voice as before. “ No one ever did that before, and, by God, no one ever will again.”

He shook off Pollock’s hand, turned away and started down the corridor; a sharp angle of the hall leading to the stairs hid him from view; then Pollock, with a curse, re-entered the room from which he came and slammed the door.

In the supper-room, Daniels’ absence was not commented upon; indeed, there was scarcely anything noticed except the rich food, the well-iced champagne, and the fact

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## *THE STRANGE CASE*

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that Mary Page had not so much as touched the rim of a glass to her lips since the affair began. The man with the eyeglass leaned toward her.

“It’s most unusual,” said he. “Drink like this was made for such beauty as yours. It’s really not right to disdain it.”

“Look at her cheeks!” cried one of the girls, a pretty black-eyed thing, whose abandon of manner was becoming more and more pronounced with each drink. “They are like pale roses.” She held a brimming glass toward the young actress. “One drink, Mary Page,” she cried. “Just one, and the pale roses will turn to red!” But Mary drew back, her hand lifted to keep the glass away. The rising tide of intoxication all about her seemed to affect her as one is affected by some loathsome, approaching thing.

She grew whiter and whiter. Her eyes seemed set and staring—strange looking. She half rose, her head whirling. She seemed about to collapse. She sank back into her chair, holding fast to the table’s edge.

Instantly, the rest of the party were upon

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*OF MARY PAGE*

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their feet. Excited, drunken tongues began to babble incoherently.

“She’s fainted!” cried one.

“Open the window. Give her air,” suggested a man seated not far from her.

“Rot! Give her some wine!”

This was the advice which appealed most strongly. A glass of champagne was handed from one to another. The man with the eyeglass supported Mary; another held the wine to her lips.

With a piercing shriek, the girl dashed it from her. For an instant, she stood in her place, white and wild-eyed, staring at the amazed, drink-muddled faces. Then she turned sharply, tore open the hall door, rushed out of the room and disappeared.

## CHAPTER X

### THE MURDER

FOR a moment no one spoke. They heard the sound of her running feet in the hall, followed by the crash of a closing door. There was an instant of absolute silence. Then the report of a revolver, sullen and muffled, reached their ears.

“ My God! ” shrilled one of the women. “ What was that? ”

With fear in their faces, they rushed pell-mell from the room. No one was in sight.

“ It came from that direction, ” spoke a man less drunk than the others.

The door of the room occupied by Pollock was thrown open; a cry of horror arose. In a crumpled heap upon the floor lay Mary Page; near her was stretched the dead body of David Pollock, and between them, shining in the overhead lights, lay a pearl-handled revolver.

Like flame the news swept through the restaurant; the halls filled with excited peo-

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## *STRANGE CASE OF MARY PAGE*

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ple, the grill was a turmoil; the stairway leading to the floor above was thick with the curious.

“Keep them back,” directed the manager of Falconi’s, to his employees. “Don’t let them up.”

“It was the girl done it,” said the head waiter. “I saw her run down the hall like as if she was crazy, and go into the room. No one else was there but him.”

The manager, an emotional Italian, wrung his hands.

“This’ll be in all the papers,” moaned he. “Falconi’s’ll get a bad name, and business’ll go to the devil for six months.”

Inside the room at the end of the hall, the erstwhile revellers stood with staring eyes and looks aghast, gazing at the prostrate forms on the floor. Mary Page lay with her white arms outflung, her beautiful, pale face turned upward. Pollock looked huddled and ugly; there was a smear on his shirt-front, the gray of death was in his face, a frozen terror in his staring eyes.

A stolid waiter lifted one of the arms and then released it; it fell with a limpness that caused the onlookers to shudder.

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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“Is he dead?” asked the man with the single eyeglass.

“He is,” replied the unemotional waiter.

A ripple of fresh fear disturbed the supper party; above it arose the chilling whisper—“the police!”

“For God’s sake get me away from here,” begged one of the women to the man nearest her. “I don’t want to be mixed up in this.”

Suddenly there came a commotion at the door; a dozen arms sought to prevent the entrance of someone; a high-pitched voice having its taint of the fear which hung so thickly all about, was lifted sharply.

“Stand aside!” it commanded. “Stand aside!”

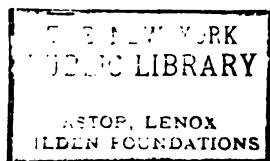
“You can’t come in!” cried a waiter agitatedly. “We have orders——”

But Philip Langdon with a lunge of his strong body brushed the men aside. His glance almost instantly rested upon the prone form of Mary; with a cry he fell upon his knees beside her and gathered her in his arms.

“Mary!” Holding her tight, he looked into her face; the golden lashes rested upon



**THE DOOR OF THE ROOM OCCUPIED BY POLLOCK  
WAS THROWN OPEN.**



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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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the pale cheeks, the lovely head drooped weakly. "Mary, speak to me!"

But no murmuring answer came from the pale lips; Langdon, his face rigid, his eyes stern, lifted her, carried her across the room into a small alcove and laid her gently upon a couch. Then he spoke, his head turned toward the others.

"Will someone go for a physician, please?"

There was a stir in the crowd, but the stolid waiter held up a protesting hand.

"There won't be anyone sent for but the cops," stated he.

There was a crass, unemotional brutality about this speech which caused even the hardened Broadwayites who filled the room, to look angrily at the man.

"Is she to be allowed to die?" asked a woman shrilly.

"That ain't my business," spoke the stolid one. "Another thing; what are you all worrying about her for? Nobody's doing any of it about him."

A shiver ran over Langdon; the stark form of the wine agent, toward which the man nodded, seemed unutterably repulsive, hud-

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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dled there with that spreading, darkening stain upon the breast. He took a step toward the body; as he did so his foot struck something and he looked instinctively down.

“It’s the gun,” the unemotional waiter informed him. “It’s the gun she shot him with.”

Like a flash Langdon whirled upon the speaker; one hand reached out and grasped the man’s shoulder. His brows were frowning and his jaw locked.

“What’s that?” grated he. “What’s that you say?”

“Let go,” said the waiter still without any show of feeling. “Don’t start anything with me. I’m only saying what everybody else is a-saying.”

Still holding the man’s shoulder in a crushing grip, Langdon turned his eyes, startled and filled with a strange expression, upon the others.

“Is this true?” he demanded. “Do you think that she,” his pointing finger indicating Mary Page, “shot that man?”

There was a movement among those in the room; for an instant all seemed upon the verge of utterance—then they seemed, simul-

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## OF MARY PAGE

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taneously, to change their minds. A deep hush followed. Slowly Langdon's eyes went from one to the other; slowly his grip upon the revolver, its ivory and steel shining hard and deadly, like a venomous thing, lay before him; and as his gaze went to it, the blood suddenly left his face and again a shiver ran over him.

"She didn't do it," said he, in a low, husky voice. "She didn't do it."

"Well," asked the stolid waiter, "if she didn't—who did?"

Langdon's head went up sharply; with nervous fingers he pulled at the collar which seemed suddenly too tight for him.

"She didn't do it," he repeated tonelessly, "I *know* she didn't."

He turned toward the alcove, and as he passed the body of Pollock, the man with the single eyeglass nudged a friend.

"He's in a regular blue funk. The very sight of that thing there seems to turn him sick."

With averted face—a face as deathly as Mary's own, Langdon reached her side. His knees trembled as he bent them to kneel by her side—the hands that sought to bring

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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the warmth of life into hers were equally cold. His head bent over her; his eyes were full of a look in which there was both terror and wonder. With his lips close to hers, he murmured:

“ Dear, dear girl! Must even *this* be charged to you! Is there nothing I can do which will save you from suffering? ”

As he knelt there came a tramp of feet in the hall; the door opened and two police, grim and accusing of face, came in.

“ Don’t anybody go out,” directed one of them, as a disturbed stir in the direction of the door leading to the adjoining room ran through the gathering. “ Headquarters has a man on the way here, and he’ll want to ask you some questions.”

But in the hall the manager of Falconi’s talked excitedly with his head waiter, and wrung his hands.

“ It will be six months before we can live this down,” lamented he. “ Once get the police in a place and business is killed.”

At this moment Daniels, manager of the Covington, came with hushed, hasty steps down the hall.

“ What’s this I hear? ” said he. He spoke

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*OF MARY PAGE*

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with some difficulty; his breath seemed to labor in his chest; his face was darkly purple, and his thick neck was gorged with blood. "What's this about Dave Pollock being shot?"

Excitedly the restaurant manager turned upon him.

"You brought that girl here," he charged, with gesticulating hands. "Why didn't you watch her?"

"What girl?" asked Daniels. His usually shifty eyes held their gaze in a way new to him; his thick fingers fumbled at his throat. "What girl do you mean?"

"What girl?" The other glared at him. "Why, Mary Page—the girl who did the shooting."

Daniels suddenly shifted his glance from the speaker's face; he gulped several times as though in an effort to swallow; and when he spoke his voice was husky and hesitating.

"Was it her that done it?" He stared stonily at the wall; then with a long, whistling intake of the breath he added: "How do you know?"

"Who else could it have been?" de-

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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manded the restaurant manager, his hands still waving. "There was no one else in the room. It must have been her."

Daniels stood for a moment, slightly rocking backward and forward on his heels; his purple face slowly grew gray and set; then an odd look of something like cunning replaced the dulled expression in his eyes.

"Who else could it have been?" said he slowly, repeating the words of the other. "That's right, isn't it?" Then he went on. "There was no one else in the room, eh? No one else? You're right! It must have been her!"

The police inspector, a burly, stern-faced man, now appeared; as he hurried down the hall he said to the restaurant manager:

"I knew we'd get something like this on you, some time. You've been working this night stuff too strong."

Instantly the restaurant manager and his head waiter were at his heels, protesting and explaining; Daniels followed the three into the room where the tragedy had occurred. The cold, observing eye of the inspector seemed to take in the situation with one long, clear look.

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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“ Anyone touch the body? ” he asked, looking from one to the other.

“ They say not, ” spoke one of the policemen, and a murmur of confirmation went about. “ And they tell me that the gun is just as it was when the thing was discovered.”

The inspector stooped and picked up the weapon; his practiced fingers threw open the cylinder.

“ One empty shell, ” said he grimly. Then, with his cold eyes going about, “ Anybody identify the revolver? ”

At the entrance of the police inspector, Philip Langdon had arisen from Mary’s side and turned from the alcove into the main room. A flutter of the girl’s long lashes and the color slowly drifting into her cheeks told him that the only danger was from the police; and so he turned to meet it, pale, but with resolute face.

From one to the other went the searching look of the inspector; then it rested upon Langdon; the young man saw the ivory-handled revolver held in the outstretched hand, the revolver which had let the life out of David Pollock; but his face did not change in expression, the gaze with which he met the

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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cold eyes of the inspector was steady and admitted nothing. When his questioning glance left the last person, the inspector made a gesture of impatience.

“ Nobody knows the gun,” said he frowningly. Then he tossed the weapon to one of the policemen. “ Put it in your pocket,” said he.

“ Wait!”

All turned to see who had uttered the word; it was Shale and one of his hands was upheld to prevent the revolver being put away. “ Let me see that,” and he advanced a step or two.

The policeman held the weapon out in the palm of his hand; without touching it, Shale gazed steadily at it.

“ I think I know it,” said he. “ Is there an inscription on the trigger-guard—the letters ‘ D. P.’? ”

The inspector took the revolver quickly and his eyes went to the place indicated.

“ Yes,” said he, and there was a ring of satisfaction in his voice. “ Here they are! ”

“ The revolver belonged to Pollock,” said Shale, with a side nod of the head toward the body. “ I’ve seen it often.”

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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There was a moment's silence; then a whispering arose among those present; through this ran a word repeated again and again with awful meaning—"Suicide!" The inspector of police caught the whisper; a corrugation appeared between his brows; shoving the weapon deep into his pocket he bent over the body of Pollock. Deftly he unfastened the collar and the neckband; then the shirt was pulled open and the onlookers shrank shudderingly away. The inspector arose, and his glance singled out Daniels.

"You'd known Pollock a long time, hadn't you?"

"Yes," replied the manager, as he bit at his nails.

"Was he left-handed?"

"No."

"Sure?"

"I'm as certain of that as I am about myself."

"Then this thing is no suicide," stated the police official. "To make that wound, Pollock would have had to be left-handed."

Again a stir ran about; again a whispering arose. Through it came the voice of Shale.

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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"He wasn't left-handed—no. And that ain't all. He didn't have that revolver tonight—in fact, he ain't had it for about four days. The last time I saw——"

"One moment," said the inspector. He looked at Shale valuingly, as though he were saying: "What I get, I'm going to get from this fellow." And so he desired to miss nothing. "What is your name?" he asked.

"Richard Shale," replied the man.

"You were in this supper party tonight?"

"No. I was in the Metropole bar when the news came in that Pollock had been shot here at Falconi's. He was a friend of mine, and so I hurried around."

"You were going to say something about the last time you saw this revolver, I think," and as he spoke the inspector produced the weapon.

"Yes," nodded Shale. "Yes, I was. The last time I saw it was about four nights ago in Central Park. Mary Page had it. She pointed it at him and would have shot him then if it hadn't been for a mounted policeman coming between them."

The inspector's eyes glinted.

"Mary Page," said he. "Who is she?"

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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“She’s the girl who was in this room with Mr. Pollock,” spoke the stolid waiter. “It was her we found senseless on the floor beside him when we ran into the room after the shot was fired.”

“I see.” There was triumph in the voice of the police inspector. “And who else was in the room?”

“No one.”

Again there fell a silence; and this time no one stirred, not a breath of a whisper was heard. The white face of Philip Langdon seemed sunken and old.

“Where is Mary Page?” The official asked the question of the stolid waiter. Instantly the man turned toward the alcove; one hand pointed.

“She is——” he began, and then stopped, his face blank, his jaw fallen. “She’s gone,” he cried, amazed.

With a leap Philip Langdon gained the alcove. The man had spoken the truth. The couch upon which Mary had lain was unoccupied; a window beside it stood open, the curtains stirring in the night wind; but Mary Page had disappeared.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE DISAPPEARANCE

A MOMENT or two after Philip Langdon had turned away from her to give his attention to the Police, Mary Page had opened her eyes. Faintly, as though from afar off, the sound of the voices in the room into which the alcove opened came to her, and by degrees she began to sense the meaning of the words. She passed one hand over her eyes with the gesture of one trying to remember; then she arose and clinging to the back of a chair for support, she stood listening.

The voices no longer seemed far away; the haze of unconsciousness had completely passed; things were sharp and well defined. Suddenly something was said which caused her to start; her head went up, her hand was pressed to her heart.

“She would have shot him *then*,” the voice of Shale was saying, “if it hadn’t been

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## *STRANGE CASE OF MARY PAGE*

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for a mounted policeman coming between them."

With the faintly returned color once more fading from her cheeks, Mary, her hand still pressed to her heart, moved toward the entrance to the alcove. No one saw her, the eyes of all were fastened upon Shale and the Police Inspector. She saw Langdon, with set and intent face, also with his gaze upon the two men—then the body of Pollock, huddled and hideous, met her eyes, the blood smear upon his breast showing with ghastly distinctness. A scream which was never sounded arose to her lips; her eyes dilated, her hands covered her face to shut out the sight. Then faint, her soul swimming in fear, she crept back into the alcove.

Like a caged thing, unreasoning, apparently, with but a single thought in her mind—to leave the object of her fright as far behind as possible—she looked about. The open window with its curtains stirring in the light wind, was before her—outside was a fire-escape; with not an instant's hesitation she passed through the window and down the iron ladder; then she stepped from the lowest rung into the semi-darkness of

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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what seemed to be a sort of alley. On every side were tall buildings; the narrow, canyon-like passage ran off between like a noisome thing which hugged the shadows and feared the light. With a breath of prayer on her lips, Mary moved along in the shadows; hardly had she gone a half dozen steps when she felt a touch upon her arm, and looking up, she saw the shadowy outline of a man at her side.

“Hello,” said he. “You got here at last, eh?”

With rapidly beating heart Mary drew away a step; mutely she strove to pierce the gloom that she might get some idea as to what manner of person it was.

“I’ve been waiting for you a good half hour,” said the man. “And, believe me, this alley is no cozy corner to lounge in.”

Still Mary made no answer. The man grunted contemptuously.

“You’re scared,” said he. “You ain’t got a peep left in you and all because of Pollock.”

Mary gasped; her groping hands felt for support; leaning against a wall she waited, still making no reply.

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## OF MARY PAGE

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“ I heard it around in front while I was talking to a cab driver,” said the man, “ and I came here right away so’s to be sure to be on hand when you came down. Don’t worry, it’s nothing to be scared about. A guy like Pollock was bound to be cracked by somebody, some day.”

Mary turned with a cry and rushed away into the darkness. But quick as was her movement, the man was quicker. He had caught up with her in a dozen yards; his hand closed upon her arm with a powerful grip, and he whirled her about with an impatient oath.

“ Don’t I tell you there ain’t no use being scared? ” spoke he. “ Don’t I? You’re all right. Nobody seen you come down the fire-escape, did they? ”

“ No,” breathed Mary, her voice strange with fear.

“ Then what are you shivering about? Are you sorry you done it? ”

Once more the cry arose to Mary’s lips; this time the man caught her arm in a strong grip and prevented her moving away.

“ Cut that stuff out! ” commanded he angrily. “ Have you lost your senses? This

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## **THE STRANGE CASE**

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ain't no way to act. You'd think I was here to give you up to the cops, instead of to get you safe away."

"Safe away!" Incredulity was strong in the whispered words.

"Sure!" There was amazement in the man's voice. "I've fixed it so we can get into Barker's by the back window. To come right out of the alley ain't safe now, after what's happened; anyhow, it's always best to have more than one chance for a get-away. So come along, and don't make no noise."

The girl stumbled after him blindly. The fear of what she had heard at Falconi's completely possessed her; who the man was, and what manner of place Barker's might be, she had no idea. That she might be plunging into deeper danger was a thought which her mind, in its numbed state, failed to grasp. She could only think of the police, of the words of the grim-faced inspector, of the law—that grawsome thing which devours victims. She must escape. Here was a way of effecting it. Sobbing, trembling, she crept after the man through the grim alley. Her eyes were blinded by tears; and

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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her weak steps made progress difficult. After a little the man stopped.

“Say,” demanded he, “what’s the trouble? Can’t you see?”

“It’s dark,” she said, in a low voice.

“I guess it must be you just coming out from under the electrics,” suggested her conductor. “I got everything spotted pretty good, myself.”

He took her arm and helped her along. Beside a huge bulk, towering aloft to the narrow strip of starlit sky, he paused once more.

“Here we are,” said he. “Can you see the lights up there? Well, Barker’s going full blast tonight; and being in the back the bulls never notice it.”

He put his fingers to his lips and blew a few far-reaching notes. A head appeared at an unlighted window, far up the wall, and an answering signal sounded.

“Good,” muttered the man. Then to Mary. “That’s Larry the Josh. Do what he tells you now when you get up there, Sadie; he’s all right.”

Mary did not note the name by which he addressed her; but, looking fearfully up,

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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she did note the fact that the man above was passing something out of the window.

"He's all right," continued the man at her side. "But, of course, you don't want to tell him anything. If Larry knew that you'd got yourself invited to a supper party, at Falconi's for the purpose of annexing about a quart of diamonds worn by the other women, he'd show too much interest, maybe. Do what he tells you, but say nothing. Then you'll be all right."

Just then something from above touched Mary on the shoulder, and the man seized it. It was a rope with a sling at the end of the sort known as a boatswain's chair.

"Keep your nerve now," spoke the man. "This thing's perfectly safe." He adjusted the sling deftly and then gave a couple of tugs upon the rope, evidently a signal. "Fend yourself off from the wall," he whispered as someone above began to heave on the line. "And keep a good grip. I'll see you in an hour."

Mary saw the man slink away in the gloom of the alley; then slowly she felt herself lifted from the ground, and ascend, now past the windows of the first, then the second floor,

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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and finally arrived at the third. Here the window was open and strong arms reached out and drew her in.

The window was then closed, the blinds were drawn down and a light was turned on. Mary found herself face to face with a rough looking man who surveyed her with small, inquisitive eyes. Two other men were in the room, and to these the rough looking man turned with a wave of the hand.

“ That’ll do,” stated he. “ You can both beat it.”

Obediently the two left the room, and again the man turned his small, inquisitive eyes upon Mary.

“ Friend of Budge Dudley’s, eh? ” spoke he. “ All right; Budge is a friend of mine, and I’m always willing to do the right thing by a pal.” Then, curiously: “ But, say, kid—what’s it all about—cops? ”

Mary nodded. The place was cold and she had left Falconi’s without even so much as a scarf. Her beautiful shoulders and arms shone like satin under the light; the rich folds of her gown clung to her form, suggesting a beauty which made the man’s eyes glisten.

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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“ All right,” said he. “ To get *you* away from the cops is a trick I’d turn twice a day. But,” and his glance took in the full details of her costume, “ it must have been some swell job you were on to call for that rig.”

There was a moment’s silence, the man evidently awaiting a reply; but as Mary made none, he grinned and went on.

“ Nothing to communicate, eh? All right; Budge Dudley was always a kind of close worker; when he had anything on hand he generally kept it to himself.” He stood thoughtfully for a moment, then said: “ You stick right here. When he comes, I’ll send him in to you.” He went to a door and with his hand on the knob, nodded. “ So long,” said he.

He opened the door; a flood of light came through from beyond, the roar of many voices, queer whirling and clicking sounds and the thick haze of cigar smoke. Then the door closed and Mary was alone. For a moment she stood like a beautiful statue, her hands clasped, her lovely face white, wondering and full of suffering, then little by little, as no immediate peril seemed to threaten her, she recovered her poise; her

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*OF MARY PAGE*

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brain began once more to work clearly. From beyond the door through which Larry the Josh had passed, came dully the sounds which she had heard when it was opened. Timidly, yet curiously, she approached the door; with her ear to its edge the sounds were made distinct, but not sufficiently so as to convey any idea of their character. Then gaining courage she turned the knob; the door opened an inch or two and she peered through.

The room beyond was both huge and gorgeous; it seemed crowded with men who sat and stood about tables, smoking and seeming intent upon what was proceeding. At one end was a sideboard at which presided two white-jacketed colored men; wines and liquors were being poured into rows of glasses, waiters were hurrying here and there with trays holding delicate food, fruit, and wines.

Though the girl did not know it, Barker's was famous in the night life of New York as the most magnificently equipped gambling place in the city. At the roulette wheels, faro, poker, and crap tables then running, fortunes were staked nightly—

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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desperate men risked the hazard of chance; rich men were made poor and poor men poorer—and behind all the gilded soulless machinery of the place sat Barker, smooth, sleek, smiling—avarice personified.

The whirling wheels, the turning cards, the stacks of chips and of money, told Mary, inexperienced as she was, the nature of the place; she noticed the men about the tables, their set faces and intent, greedy eyes, fascinating her. Then the thought of Budge Dudley's promise to come for her in an hour occurred to her. It was one of the few things which the man had said which her fear had permitted her to understand at the time. But she had heard everything, her mind had retained it, and now, bit by bit, it all came back to her, and she understood.

“There was a girl—one of the supper party—who was a thief,” she told herself. “She attended the supper party to steal from someone, and was to escape unnoticed by way of the fire-escape. The man in the dark mistook me for her; but when he returns he will see his mistake and——”

She paused, still holding the door to the gaming-room slightly open and trying to

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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picture the result of the man's discovery. But the mental limning was still in process when there came a sudden and startling interruption. A door was flung open, a man leaped into the crowded room, excitement in his face and both hands gesticulating madly.

“The police!”

All leaped to their feet; tables and chairs were overturned, money and chips and paraphernalia were scattered about the floor; cries, oaths, instructions, arose in a bedlam of sound. Windows were flung up, but those who sprang to them shrank back at sight of the leap; then the police, in uniform and plain clothes, rushed into the place, weapons drawn and stern commands upon their lips.

To all others in the place the thing was a raid upon Barker's gambling house, but to Mary Page it had another and more awful meaning. The police had been in search of her; they had learned of her hiding place; they had come for her to drag her away, to charge her with taking David Pollock's life, with *murder!*

Instinctively she closed the door; with pale face and eyes once more filled with wild

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## ***STRANGE CASE OF MARY PAGE***

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terror she looked about for a way of escape. Only the windows were possible, and toward these she had taken a half dozen wavering steps when she heard a heavy hand upon the door, then it was thrown back against the wall, and with a moan of despair she found herself in the clutch of a man from headquarters.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE GREAT QUESTION

THE plain clothes man whirled Mary Page round and looked into her face. Then he turned his head and called sharply to someone in the gaming-room.

“Hello, there, Riley! Come in here a minute.”

In a moment another man entered. He had the same square face, the same sort of derby hat, the same compact build as the first.

“Take a look here,” said the first detective. “Is this the woman you want?” Riley approached and examined Mary Page carefully. The poor girl shrank back, covering her eyes with trembling hands, in the hope that thereby she could blot out the horrible letters—a ghastly red—which seemed to whirl before them, forming, dissolving, and reforming into that dreadful word: MURDER!

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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But the plain clothes man roughly snatched her hands away.

"None of that!" commanded he. "And hold your head up so's I can get a right kind of look at you."

He studied the girl from under frowning brows. Then he rubbed his square chin and looked at his colleague.

"At first glance I'd say it was her," said he. "The clothes are right—glad rags, and not too many. But"—He shook his head uncertainly—"I don't know. I wouldn't be sure."

"Right," said the other briefly. "We'll take her in, anyhow. Our warrants cover everyone found in Barker's place."

"Wait a second!" Riley still looked at Mary. "What's your name?" he asked.

As she stood trembling and silent, he added: "Don't deny it, now; you're Maggie Hale, the girl who hangs around the swell restaurants looking for victims for Barker to trim." As no answer came from Mary Page, Riley nodded to his mate. "I guess it's her, all right. If it wasn't she'd deny it."

From the street below came the clanging

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**OF MARY PAGE**

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of many gongs; in the gorgeously fitted up gaming-room the police had the two score or more gamblers rounded up and handcuffed. Some of the captives were of the careless, hard-drinking kind who loved play for the excitement it brought; others were of the cool, calculating sort who lived by the sharp use of their wits. But by far the greater proportion was the wolf-type, the dangerous criminal always ready to turn his hand to any deed of deceit or violence, and who now stood scowling and with sneering lips under the ready revolvers of the police.

Amid the cautious clanging of the gongs in the street, there came a tramping of feet on the stairs; an additional force of policemen, those who had been left to guard all possible means of escape, now appeared.

“Wagons all backed up,” announced a brisk looking sergeant to the gray mustached official in command of the raiding party.

“All right,” replied the captain. With an unerring eye he indicated one after the other, the dangerous individuals among the prisoners.

“Take these down first,” directed he. “Have each two handcuffed to a patrolman

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## **THE STRANGE CASE**

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and use the night stick if they so much as peep."

Scowling and with bitter exclamations, the indicated gamblers were manacled to policemen, who led them out in pairs, and down to the street where a line of patrol-wagons were awaiting. One by one these were filled and dashed away, guarded inside by burly officers and on each side by mounted men, ready to frustrate any attempt at escape.

There was but a single remaining wagon; and among the last to be led down to this was Mary Page. At the foot of the stairs the keen-eyed captain of police held up his hand and the plain clothes men with Mary came to a halt.

"Who is this?" asked the official.

"We think it's Maggie Hale, Barker's decoy," said Riley. "But neither of us have ever seen her, so we're not sure."

"Have Bond take a look at her when you get her to the station," directed the captain. "He's up on all this high-class stool pigeon stuff."

Mary a moment later found herself in the patrol-wagon together with some half dozen men. As the vehicle whirled away over the

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*OF MARY PAGE*

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stones the men, mostly youthful and all under the influence of liquor, sang loudly and discordantly; also they laughed and jeered at the silent guard of policemen. Mary crouched, shivering and white, at the rear end, her frightened face and mute agony appealed to one of the officers, and he said with rough kindness:

“Cold, sis?”

“Yes,” said the girl, her bare arms clasped over her breast, her fair shoulders gleaming and unprotected.

The policeman called to a mate who sat with the driver.

“Hey, Kelly, throw me that extra coat off the front seat, there.”

Kelly did as was bidden; it was a heavy blue policeman’s coat with shining buttons, and the good-natured policeman threw it over the girl’s shoulders and fastened it under her chin.

“There you are,” said he. “Now, just pull it around you and you’ll be snug enough.”

Mary murmured her thanks; it was the first bit of kindness, so it seemed, that had been done her all that eventful night, and

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## **THE STRANGE CASE**

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she tried to find courage in it. But all the kindness, all the good-will in the world could not wipe out the ghastly red letters which still danced and formed and reformed in her mind. Murder! She saw the gray prison walls, the great gate, the gloomy corridors, the narrow cell. Also she saw the flaring headlines in the public prints; the morbid crowds before the bulletin boards reading how she, the rising young actress, had shot a man to death. Before the eyes of her mind then came the cheerless courtroom, thronged with the curious; upon the bench was a hard-faced judge; at the bar, lawyers with their papers and learned arguments. With horror she thought of the twelve who would have her life in their hands—a jury of strange, unsympathetic men. She saw, with a hand of ice clutching at her heart, herself condemned; she saw the dreary agonizing days felt by the condemned, go by; and then, with a smothered cry which brought the attention of both policemen and trapped gamblers to her, she saw the death chair with all its grim horror, in the pale light of early morning.

But this panorama of terror was now

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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brought to a halt, for the moment at least, by the patrol wagon drawing up before the station. The gamblers were, under a strong guard, permitted to alight, and then all were led into the building. A gray-haired red-faced sergeant sat at a high desk with a huge blotter before him; he took the names of the prisoners with business-like celerity and as each was done with he was taken away to the cells. At last Mary alone remained. The sergeant glanced at her inquiringly.

“What name?” he asked.

But the girl made no reply. It was dimly in her mind that she must say nothing. Now that she was taken, she must be mute. For she had read of the methods of the police—the remorseless inquisition called the third degree which tore admissions from frightened unaccustomed people, and then used them to aid in their convictions. There was but one way to save herself from this and that was to answer no questions whatsoever—not even those which might fix her identity,—until she had seen Philip Langdon.

“What name?” asked the house sergeant once more.

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## **THE STRANGE CASE**

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But Mary was silent. The plain clothes man, Riley, grinned.

“She don’t seem to be saying anything tonight,” said he. “Put her down as any old thing, serge, till somebody can identify her. We’ll place her by morning.”

But in this the detective was wrong. Dawn found Mary in a dim cell, her beautiful face hidden in her round arms, her golden hair streaming all about her. Man after man had been brought in to look at her, but still she remained unknown. Bond, the man who had been depended upon to name her as the decoy of Barker’s gambling house, gave her one keen, brief look and shook his head positively.

“It’s not the Hale woman,” he said. “Don’t know who she is. Never saw her before.”

The huge presses in the basements of newspaper buildings threw their thousands of printed and folded journals into neat piles. On the front page of each, spread over the top of two, three, or four columns, according to the temperament of the paper, was the sensational headline telling of the murder of David Pollock by Mary Page. Already the

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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delivery men had them on the streets; trucks laden with them rumbled into the railroad stations, they began to flare upon the news-stands opening for the morning's trade.

The pronouncement by the police that a famous actress, young and beautiful, had fired the fatal shot, had stirred the reporters to a high pitch of interest. And the fact that the girl had escaped from under the hands of one of New York's keenest inspectors and was still at large, thrilled their hearts with joy. The shrewdest men in the game hung about police headquarters hoping for developments; the local room saw little groups perched upon worn desks, cigars and pipes alight and eagerly discussing the situation. Night editors clung to their desks in the hope of news that would provide a sensational fillip for the big city edition.

“Where is Mary Page?” was the universal question.

Newspaper men, detectives, patrolmen, were searching high and low; not a nook was left unvisited, not a corner but was examined. Details were watching the railroad stations; each road was guarded by motorcycle and mounted policemen to prevent the

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## ***STRANGE CASE OF MARY PAGE***

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girl's escape by means of a motor car. As the city awoke and amazedly read the news at its thousands of breakfast tables, it took up the question:

“Where is Mary Page?”

And during all the search, in the midst of all the wonder, the precautions, the preventatives against her escape, Mary Page sat in her narrow cell, sobbing out her poor heart—already in the clutches of the law—but, blind thing that it is—it did not know.

## CHAPTER XIII

### LANGDON'S DESPAIR

THE city was well astir and the story began to spread. Upon the news-stands were piled great heaps of damp newspapers fresh from the press, the black headlines proclaiming the sensational facts in their emphatic way. In the subway trains, in the surface cars, at breakfast tables, upon street corners, people devoured the story of the killing of Pollock and of the escape of Mary Page.

“It was a frame-up of some kind!” exclaimed the knowing ones. “She never could have got away from the cops if they hadn’t turned their heads or winked at it.”

“How do they know she killed him?” asked the others. “No one saw her do it.”

And to this, others again, replied glibly.

“Oh, she must have had it in for him. Don’t this friend of the dead man’s—Shale—tell how she kept Pollock’s revolver and how she once tried to shoot him in the park. And it was the very same weapon he was

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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killed with. And more than that: it couldn't have been anyone else; no one was in the room where the murder was done except the two."

Newsboys shouted the facts in the street; the theatrical district was astir hours earlier than usual; actors in dressing gowns, and actresses in negligee, pored over the news, amazed and wondering, in their hotel rooms or apartments. But the police, as time passed, were fairly confounded. No trace of the girl was to be had, search as they would; it was as if the ground had opened and swallowed her.

"Keep at it," the commissioner instructed the inspectors, when he reached his office and heard headquarters' version of the case. "She is somewhere in the city. Don't miss a trick, and you'll take her before night."

But if the public was amazed and the police department confounded—what was the state of mind of Philip Langdon! The night had been one of feverish activity; he had searched high and low—no possible place was overlooked, but his results were no better than those of the authorities. Mary was not to be found.

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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And now, hollow-eyed and tense, he paced his office; his hands were clenched, his jaw was set, his expression was one of despair. Through the glass of his office door he saw the clerks and stenographer, each with a newspaper, greedily absorbing the story. Faintly from the street far below came the cries of the newsboys. In his mind's-eye he called up a picture of the whole vast city—curious, morbid, clamoring for more and more intimate details.

“It's frightful—frightful!” cried the young man. “The idea of that gentle girl being charged with a thing like this—being hunted like a wild thing—being forced to hide in God knows what, cranny or hovel!” His clenched hands lifted. “And all because of Dave Pollock—as black-hearted a wolf as ever prowled at large, and who deserved to die if ever man did!”

He paused in his pacing; before him was a mirror; and into this he peered intently, marking his pallor, his hollow eyes and tense expression.

“One night,” he told himself in a low tone. “Only one, and I'm already like a ghost.” He covered his face with his hands for an

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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instant, then once more flung them outward. "Oh, Mary, dear, dear little girl." His voice had sunk to a sort of moan. "I don't seem to be able to help you, no matter what I do. Fate itself seems against us both."

In the outer office the clerk laid down his newspaper; he was a bushy-haired youth with carefully manicured nails, and he inspected these as he spoke to the stenographer.

"Looks as if they had it on her, don't it?"

The girl looked up; resentment was in her face and her eyes snapped.

"I don't care," she declared. "She's a sweet, nice girl! I've talked to her here in the office and I've seen her on the stage, and if she killed him, it was his own fault. He deserved it."

"If you only knew something of the case you'd make a fine witness for the defense when she comes to trial," said the manicured youth humorously. "You'd say everything you could to help her out, wouldn't you?"

"Well, why shouldn't I? She's like an angel compared with a devil when you put her and that man Pollock side by side. He's been a beast. Everyone knows that."

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## OF MARY PAGE

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“ Well, the law don’t go much on such things. It’ll want to know if she shot him, or no; and the jury’ll decide accordingly.”

“ Any twelve men that would send a girl to the chair for——” but the stenographer’s remarks were cut short by the door opening and a woman entering the room. She was a frowsy looking woman, in faded, disordered clothes; her gray hair straggled out from under a battered hat with feathers, and her face was reddened with drink. She approached the clerk’s desk with diffident step.

“ Is this the lawyers office?” she asked in a throaty voice, her unsteady eyes trying to fasten themselves on the bushy-haired youth.

“ Yes, but not the lawyer you want,” the clerk replied. “ We don’t handle police court cases. Four doors down the corridor. That’s the place you want. You’ll see the name Sharkey on the door.”

But the woman held to a corner of the desk and shook her head.

“ I know Counsellor Sharkey,” she declared. “ And he’s a skin. He’ll take your money and then let them send you up.” She looked about; on the desk lay some printed stationery; indicating the name “ Philip

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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Langdon" with one finger, she said: "This is the name she told me. This is the name I want."

"Who told you?" asked the clerk.

But the woman winked sagaciously.

"I guess you'd like to know, wouldn't you?" said she. "But you ain't a-going to. I'm here to see Counsellor Langdon; and what I've got to tell, I'll tell to him."

The clerk looked across at the stenographer; and that young lady nodded in the affirmative.

"Better tell him about her," she said. "It might be something."

The clerk arose, opened the door of the private office and looked in.

"Woman wants to see you, Mr. Langdon," said he. "Someone sent her, she says; but she'll not say who or what it's about."

"Send her in," said Langdon.

The woman made her way into the inner office and posed in the center of a rug?

"Is this the Counsellor?" she inquired.

"Yes," replied the young attorney.

"All right," she said. Then in a confidential sort of way: "Last night I was pinched and got taken to the station house.

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## OF MARY PAGE

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But the judge let me off this morning," she grinned, "when I promised him I'd ease off on the stuff."

Langdon glanced impatiently into the outer office as though about to call the clerk to show the caller out. But she held up one hand admonishingly.

"Now don't do anything like that," she said. "Hold your horses. I didn't come here to tell you my troubles. I was asked to come to tell you someone's else."

He turned and looked at her.

"It's all right," she assured him. "No stall. I'm giving you the facts. They put me down on the blotter as being a bit soaked and they locked me up in a cell. I thought it was going to be a private one, but some time late in the night they brought in a lot of people—some party that'd been pulled, I guess. One of them was a girl and they put her in along with me."

"A girl!" Wild surmise was in Langdon's eyes; he stared at the woman eagerly.

"Yes, and as classy a one as I ever put my two eyes on," stated the woman. "And dressed just like a girl in a picture. I asked her who she was, but she wouldn't tell; and

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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when I asked her what she was in for, she wouldn't tell that either. Not that she was uppish or anything, I could see that; but because she was scared clean through to the heart."

"What was she like?" asked Langdon, now on his feet, his hands gesturing sharply.

"Yellow hair," said the woman, "like silk. And blue eyes, and skin like an infant's." And while the young man gazed at her, his surprise too great for speech, she fumbled in a shabby handbag and took out a scrap of paper. "When I told her I'd like as not get off in the morning," said she, "she gave me this and asked me if I'd hold my tongue and bring it—the paper, I mean," with another grin, "to you."

Langdon had the scrap in his hands in a moment, and his eyes took in the penciled words:

"Philip—come to me,—MARY."

He crushed the paper in his hands and stood looking at the woman.

"You say you don't know how she came to be there?" said he.

"No. She came in with a crowd that had

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***OF MARY PAGE***

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been pulled somewhere. I didn't get a chance to talk to any of the others."

"What police station is it?"

"My regular one," and again the woman grinned. "I wouldn't patronize any other—the one on 59th Street."

With a face set like stone, the young attorney called to the clerk; putting a bill into the woman's not reluctant palm, he grabbed up his hat and in a few moments was in the street hailing a taxi.

Then as the machine rushed through the traffic, he sat back, his brain beating and throbbing, his lips forming and re-forming the words.

"She's in the hands of the police! No one but me—no one—can save her now!"

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE MARK OF THE BEAST

THE taxi with Philip Langdon inside drew up at the door of the police station on 59th Street; the young man leaped out and entered at the big swinging doors. A policeman standing inside nodded to him.

“Morning, Mr. Langdon,” said he.

“How are you?” said Philip in return. His eyes went about. “All straightened up for the day?”

“Not yet. The judge is still here; had a lot of work today. Barker’s place was pulled last night—gambling house, you know.”

Young Langdon gasped. A gambling house! And the police had found Mary there.

“No other raids, were there?” he asked, to make sure.

“No,” replied the policeman. “But that was enough; got quite an army of them.”

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## ***STRANGE CASE OF MARY PAGE***

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Then confidentially: "Was you sent for to look after anybody?"

"Yes," said Philip.

"Well, the judge's feeling all right this morning; go right in and tell it to him."

Langdon nodded his thanks to the good-natured guardian of the peace; for, be it known, a great deal depends upon the state of mind of a police magistrate; and an attorney finds it helpful if the "judge is feeling all right," as the policeman put it. Entering the hearing room, the young attorney found a number of policemen and well-dressed male prisoners; these latter were being led out at a side door to waiting vans, and Langdon at once mentally classed them as those taken in the gambling house raid who could not find bail. Several police reporters were also present, their interest having been stirred by the fact that some men well known in business and professional circles had been taken in the raid. One of the reporters chanced to know Langdon by sight and eagerly communicated the young attorney's identity to his friends. At once they surrounded him.

"Any news, Mr. Langdon?" asked one.

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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“ Anything about the shooting you would care to say for publication.”

“ Not at this moment,” said the young man. “ And then in a tone which at once drew their attention, he added: “ Perhaps in a very little while there will be something.”

The reporters exchanged quick looks and the little knot about Langdon drew tighter. At this moment the side door closed with a bang upon the last of the gamblers, and the magistrate, a stout, sharp-looking man with heavy-rimmed glasses and a raucous voice, rapped upon the desk before him and called:

“ What about the girl? Is she ready to talk? ”

A policeman at the door leading into the cell-room stepped forward.

“ She ain’t said a word, your honor,” said he. “ Can’t do a thing with her.”

The policeman opened the door of the cell-room and spoke to the turnkey within:

“ In a moment, your honor,” he said over his shoulder to the judge.”

“ When you say not at this moment, what do you mean? ” asked one of the newspaper men of Langdon.

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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“Exactly what the words imply,” returned the young attorney.

“Do you mean that you’ve heard something of the whereabouts of Mary Page?” Eagerly they craned their necks; hungrily their ears waited for the answer.

“I have heard something of the whereabouts of Mary Page,” said Langdon.

There was a stir inside the cell-room; the policeman at the door beckoned to someone unseen.

“This way,” said he.

“Where has she been?” asked a reporter.  
“Where is she now?”

“She is—and has been through the night—there!”

The pointing finger of Langdon indicated the cell-room door and at that very moment, Mary Page, pale, beautiful, her white shoulders and arms gleaming like marble in the cold daylight of the dingy hearing room, appeared. Electrified, the reporters grasped the situation; a dozen questions sounded in Langdon’s ears; but he was deaf to them; the only thing he saw was the white arms held out to him, the only thing he heard was the voice which cried:

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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“ Philip!”

With a bound he was at her side, his arms about her, his face held close to her own, his eyes looking into hers.

“ Mary, my dear, dear child,” he whispered.

“ Oh, Philip, I’m glad you’ve come. I waited and waited for you, dear. And my poor heart was breaking.”

Though he did not look around, Langdon sensed the fact that Mary’s identity was now known to the police; the reporters’ hurried questions had conveyed the news to both them and the magistrate.

“ Mary,” whispered the young man to her, and there was a thrill of fear in the hushed tones. “ What shall I do?”

The blue eyes looked into his face; and when she spoke, her voice was steady.

“ Do, Philip? Why, that which will most surely set me free.”

He drew in a long, shuddering breath; slowly his arms slipped from about her. He stood for a moment gazing at her, and she was startled to see how haggard he looked, how hollow were the usually bright, good-humored eyes!

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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He stood for a moment without movement, then with a sudden resolution he turned to the magistrate who had sat in silence gazing at the scene before him.

“Your Honor,” said Langdon, in a strained, low-pitched voice, “I desire to say in the presence of all here that I——” but his voice broke and fell away; the young man stood staring ahead after the fashion of one to whom a new idea had come. Then he reared his head; in a voice and with a manner remarkably altered, he resumed: “In the presence of all here I want to say that I know Mary Page to be innocent of the shooting of Dave Pollock.” He took the girl by the hand and led her forward to the desk. “She now surrenders herself to the law, knowing that it will find her guiltless.”

For a moment there was silence, then the magistrate, adjusting his glasses, said:

“Is this, then, the girl for whom the police have been searching?”

“It is,” replied Langdon.

“Then I shall be forced to hold her to await action of the county authorities,” said the magistrate.

“Philip!” breathed Mary, frightened.

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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“ My dear girl! ” He pressed both her hands, his expression one of pain. Then to the magistrate who was making out the papers he added: “ I am prepared, your honor, to enter bail in any amount for the appearance of Miss Page when wanted.”

“ Sorry, ” spoke the official briefly. “ You’ll have to make arrangements with the district attorney’s office. As far as I can hear this is a serious case; and I’ll take no chances until I’m consulted by people who are responsible.”

Then the reporters gathered about like a group of human interrogation points.

“ Would you care to state, Miss Page, ” queried one, “ how you managed to leave Falconi’s restaurant last night without having been seen? ”

“ And, also, ” asked another eagerly, “ do you care to state just how you came to be present in Barker’s place when the police arrested the inmates? ”

Mary looked at them with troubled face, her slim hands clasped before her; but Langdon put an abrupt stop to the inquisition by saying decidedly:

“ Gentlemen, Miss Page has nothing to

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***OF MARY PAGE***

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say at this time, or in the future, upon these or any other matters connected with the case. Of course, a public statement is necessary, as the affair is one which concerns the public. I shall prepare such a statement during the course of the day, and it may be had by any of you who care to call at my office in the North building."

Disappointed, and yet seeing the justice of this, the reporters desisted. The district attorney's office was called, as was police headquarters; hurried orders, exclamations of surprise and gratification, and many questions came over the wire; and within a few moments after, Mary and Langdon were re-seated in an automobile with a group of plain clothes men and whirling toward headquarters.

Here a rim of grim-faced men surrounded the girl; a stenographer at a side table sat with ready pencil and notebook. There was some question as to the presence of Langdon, but the young man was well known to the higher police officials and to one of these he said:

"I'm not here to place anything in your way. On the contrary, I am as interested

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## **THE STRANGE CASE**

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as you are in getting at all Miss Page knows of this affair. I am confident of her innocence, and a complete sifting of the case can only end in her being discharged." Then turning to Mary who stood with both hands tightly gripping his arm, he said: "Tell everything which might have a bearing upon the case, go slowly; and remember you are not being tried. These are only the police."

The girl gazed about at the circle of square, hard faces; the keen eyes were fastened upon her steadfastly; in the expressions of all she saw only the desire to fasten upon her the guilt of Dave Pollock's death, and a little shudder ran through her. Holding still tighter to the arm of Langdon, she began in a low voice to answer the questions asked her.

"Yes, my name is Mary Page; I have an apartment in the Dolly Madison Hotel on 59th Street. I have lived in New York for about ten years. I was reared in the country; and have been on the stage for about seven years."

"How long have you known Dave Pollock?"

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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“For a very long time—since I was a child, in fact. My experiences with him have not always been favorable; he drank hard and he was not nice when he drank.”

“You went with him last night to Falconi’s?”

“No. I went with Mr. Daniels, to meet some people whom he said it was necessary I should meet. I did not know Mr. Pollock was in the building until I——”

“Until you—what——?” There was eagerness in the police official’s tone.

“Until I looked in at the room where the police were and the crowd was, and saw,” here the girl’s voice sank to an awed whisper, “and saw his dead body lying upon the floor.”

There was a stir among the police.

“Do you mean to say that you did not see Pollock before that? You were seen to enter the room where he was known to be alone; a moment later he was shot down.”

“I was in the room—yes.” The girl released Langdon’s arm and pressed her hands to her head. “But I do not know how I got there. The last I remember was the supper party. Mr. Daniels had been called

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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out of the room. The people had—had——” here her face grew deathly pale and her hands trembled, “they had been drinking. I grew ill—someone offered me wine—and that’s all I knew until—I saw the police and—the body.”

“You had been drinking, then?” said the inspector in charge of the examination.

“No! No!” Her hands went up in horror; there was loathing in her face.

“Do you deny that you ran out of the supper-room?” asked the police official.

“No,” said Mary Page faintly.

“Do you deny that you entered the room where Dave Pollock was, a few moments afterward, killed?”

“No,” said Mary, in a still lower tone.

Each man in the room drew in a deep breath; all, including Langdon, knew the nature of the next question.

“Did you shoot Dave Pollock?”

There was a pause; the blood beat heavily in Langdon’s temples, his hands were clenched in a grip like that of a man who was drowning. Mary Page’s eyes were filled with fear; she made a little fluttering gesture as though weakly trying to put from her

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## OF MARY PAGE

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some frightful thing; then her answer came breathlessly, faintly:

“ I don’t know.”

The inspector took a step forward; he was like a sullen, purposeful animal who saw what he had come to think his own, attempting to escape.

“ What do you mean by that? ” he asked harshly. “ You either shot him or you did not shoot him. You *must* know which.”

Again came the weak fluttering gesture; and again came the breathless whisper:

“ I do not know.”

The police inspector turned upon Langdon angrily.

“ I thought you said you’d deal square with us? I thought you said you wanted the truth? ”

Langdon’s eyes were fixed upon Mary Page; there was a look of something like exultation in his face; and his gaze never shifted as he made reply:

“ And I meant what I said.”

The official laughed contemptuously; and the laugh was echoed by the others in the circle.

“ Meant! Well, if you’ve not ‘ fixed ’ this

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## *STRANGE CASE OF MARY PAGE*

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girl's story, I've never seen anything 'fixed' since I've been in the police business."

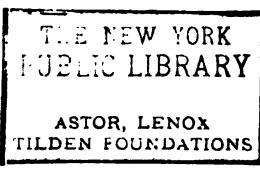
"Fixed!" cried Langdon excitedly. "Did you say fixed?" Then in a louder tone—a tone in which the exultation already in his expression was plain, he added: "The entire matter is fixed—fixed by Providence—by Fate—by whatever you care to call it. This girl is innocent; but it is as she says, she does not know if she killed Dave Pollock or not. And I can prove it."

"How?" All eyes were upon him; the square faces were each incredulous and hard.

"By this!" The hand of Langdon pointed to the bare shoulders of Mary Page. And as the gaze of the others followed the gesture, a cry of amazement came from their lips. For there, upon the smooth, gleaming shoulder of the girl, were a series of angry red marks—the prints, so it seemed—of clutching searing fingers which had burnt their way into the fair flesh. "By this: For behind it, gentlemen, stands all the learning of science and all the power of the law!"



**MARY PAGE'S EYES WERE FILLED WITH FEAR. SHE  
MADE A LITTLE FLUTTERING GESTURE.**



## CHAPTER XV

### PILING UP THE EVIDENCE

AND when the police were done with *Mary* Page, the tired, weary girl was subjected to the harrowing examination of a domineering assistant district attorney. In the statement made to this personage, Mary repeated what she had already told the police, to it she added, under broadsides of aggressive, loud-pitched questions, additional facts as to Dave Pollock, and how his affairs had, somehow, always run parallel with her own.

“ This is a strange sort of statement you have made, Miss Page,” spoke the assistant district attorney as he had his stenographer read the notes of the examination. “ If you desire to make any alteration in your answers, now is the time, for I warn you that those you have given will receive little consideration in court.”

“ What I have told you is the truth,” said Mary. “ And I have nothing to alter, or to take back.”

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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An hour later she stood in the door of the Tombs, Langdon's kiss on her lips.

"My dear, my dear," he said, and his low-pitched voice held something like a moan of infinite agony. "I thought I might save you from this gloomy place. But, Mary, I am not strong enough; I could not do it."

She looked into his pale, drawn face and he was amazed at the courage he read in her eyes.

"Philip," she said, "it is very dreadful. But it was not in your power, nor in any-one's power, to keep these gates closed for me. I must suffer as many have suffered who have been brought here. But, oh, my dear, the future is in your hands. Fight for me, Philip; save me!"

"I will," said he, and there was an unshaken purpose in his look. "I will,—if not by one means, then by another."

She was already turning away with the kind-faced warden at her side, when she stopped.

"My mother, Philip," she said. "My poor dear, little mother, there in the country. She will hear of this. Send for her, Philip; comfort her; arrange so that she can see me."

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## **OF MARY PAGE**

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“ I will, Mary,” said the young man, in a low voice.

“ And Janet! Send her to me, with some other things for me. She will know what to bring. Poor child, she’ll be frightened, I know; but she’ll do it for me, Philip.”

“ Mary, Mary,” said Langdon, and there was a break in his voice. “ Anyone would do anything for you.”

She smiled at him and her hand waved a little kiss; then the great door swung shut and hid her from view. For a short space Langdon stood still; his face was like a stone mask, so hard and set did it become. It were as though he looked into the future and saw the things which were to come—the heart-stopping things which were to loom through the mists of chance like shapeless monsters, crushing, gnawing, rending, branding the soul with ineffaceable memories. Then he turned away, and with bent head and muttering lips hurried to a waiting taxi and drove to his office in the North Building.

“ Ring for a messenger,” said he to his clerk as he passed through the outer office.

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## **THE STRANGE CASE**

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“And, Miss Davis,” to the stenographer,  
“I want you at once.”

At his desk Langdon wrote a telegram  
which read:

**Mrs. MARGUERITE PAGE,**  
*Claremont, N. Y.*

“Don’t worry. Mary all right. I’m look-  
ing after her. Come to city at once.

**PHILIP LANGDON.”**

When this had been sent off, the young  
man paced the floor and dictated a long  
statement for the press. In conclusion he  
said:

“These are the facts as far as it is ad-  
visable to make them public at this time, and  
as far as it is necessary for the public to  
know. There are certain important—one  
might say, sensational features, which it has  
been found necessary to keep in the back-  
ground because they are to form the back-  
bone of the defense. What these are, the  
trial of Mary Page will develop—if she is  
ever brought to trial, which, in the face of  
the uncovered facts, I hardly think likely.”

The newspapers eagerly seized upon this

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## OF MARY PAGE

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document and featured it with large headings. Much comment was excited as to the nature of the "sensational" revelations being held in reserve; the incident of the police examination room had leaked out, and Langdon's words in connection with it were quoted and re-quoted; and the reported finger-prints upon Mary Page's shoulder were sketched by imaginative newspaper artists with varying degrees of elaboration.

"From what Attorney Langdon is reported to have said to the police inspectors," said the *Standard*, "it is more than likely that these alleged finger-prints upon the shoulder of Mary Page are a part of the 'sensational features' he speaks of in his statement to the press. Just what he means and how he will use this curious phenomenon in a court of law, remains to be seen."

The *Star* reporter had been instrumental in uncovering the examination room episode and had added to his enterprise by securing a statement from one of the officials present.

"It was the most puzzling thing I ever had come under my observation," the inspector was quoted in the *Star* as having said. "The prisoner, you see, had been

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## **THE STRANGE CASE**

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arrested the night before, and wore an evening gown. Her arms and shoulders were bare. Now, she is an astonishingly beautiful girl, and there was not a man in the room who had not looked at her with more than usual interest. I know I did, at any rate. And here is the queer part of the thing. When I saw her, that left shoulder was as smooth and white and unmarked as it was possible for anything to be. But when I looked again, upon Langdon's pointing, the finger marks were there—red, depressed, and ugly looking. How they got there, I don't know and what Langdon meant I don't know; but there they were! of that I am sure. And between you and me, they mean something. Langdon is a clever young fellow; I've seen him work in the courts more than once. He's got something up his sleeve, mark that. And when he pulls it, it'll be the surprise of the trial."

Langdon's statement as published in all the New York papers came in usual course to the notice of Dallas, then district attorney for the metropolis.

"So Langdon don't think this thing will ever come to trial, eh?" said he, with the hard

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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smile for which he was noted. "Well, if that's the case, he's in for an unpleasant surprise. There's enough evidence connecting the girl with the killing to convince a half dozen grand juries."

And in this Dallas was right. The grand jury was in session; the number of homicides in the city in the past month had aroused both public sentiment and the agents of the law. Being a politician as well as a prosecutor, the District Attorney promptly appeared before the grand jury with his evidence; and actuated by the zeal of the moment that body brought in a true bill. Mary Page was indicted for murder in the first degree.

This was the news which greeted Mary's sweet-faced, quiet little mother as she stepped from the door of the Grand Central with Philip Langdon's strong arm supporting her. Newsboys shrieked it fervently; the newspapers in readers' hands, so it seemed to the young attorney, were like flaring banners, proclaiming the fact to the world.

"Pay no attention," said he, as he helped her into a cab. "This sort of thing has no

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## *THE STRANGE CASE*

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great significance. Perhaps a trial is best after all," with an assumption of ease which he was far from feeling; "it will give us a chance to clearly demonstrate to everyone what we know to be the truth."

Mrs. Page was a silver-haired woman with a face upon which sorrow and heart-break had traced lines of tragedy. But it was a calm face for all that—a face in which there was great sweetness and much trust. She looked up at Langdon as he finished.

"Mary is innocent," she said with serene confidence. "I am her mother, and I know her better than anyone else in the world. She could not do this, no matter what the circumstances. It is not in her nature."

Directly from the railroad station to the Tombs went the cab; the mother and Langdon were at once admitted; and Mary, with a cry of joy, was clasped in her mother's arms.

"Dear, dear mother! Oh, haven't you had enough of sorrow that they must bring this upon you."

"Mary, don't think of me, dear." The mother's voice was calm and unshaken. "It's of yourself you must think—it's your

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## **OF MARY PAGE**

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salvation that must be in your mind, in our minds, from this moment until you stand free and unspotted before everyone."

This and other brave, comforting words from her mother, lifted Mary wonderfully; when they parted there was a smile upon the pale, beautiful face, the first since the doors of the Tombs had closed upon her.

The cab took Mrs. Page to Mary's apartments at the Dolly Madison, where she was received by little Janet with tears and helpful hands; and then Langdon went back to his office. Closing the door of his private room, he paced up and down, his hands clenched, his handsome face distorted.

"Ten days," he said. "Ten days to the trial. Ten days before her life is put in the balance—ten days before she faces death for a crime she never committed. Her mother said," and here he smiled in a ghastly sort of way, "she knew her better than anyone else in the world—that Mary was innocent. But how much better I know it—how much better I know it!" He paused before the mirror; once again he looked in at himself and once again his face was tense, his eyes were hollow. "You must save her," he whis-

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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pered to his reflection, "you must save her. No matter what it costs, you must save her."

The ten days which elapsed between the indictment of Mary Page for the murder of Dave Pollock, and the opening of the trial, passed in a perfect whirl of work for Philip Langdon. His visits to Mary were many; his encouraging talks with Mrs. Page were of daily occurrence. With a craft born of terrible need, he hunted out witnesses for the defense; his days saw him in consultation with these, with private detectives, or busied with clews which might lead to something in the accused one's favor; his nights found him poring over the laws of evidence in his office, or bit by bit erecting that structure of defense which he hoped would break the force of the State's attack.

As the fateful day drew nearer, the newspapers teemed with conjecture as to the trial's outcome.

"The prosecution is confident of fastening the crime upon the young actress," said the *Standard* editorially. "Dallas is an expert in his special work and has an unflinching eye for value in evidence. He is convinced of the guilt of Mary Page and all

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## OF MARY PAGE

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the forces of his office are at work against her. Opposed to this master of criminal law is a youthful attorney whose experience in this particular field is *nil*. But in the place of experience he has zeal in the cause he has undertaken to defend. He is the affianced of the prisoner—they were to have been married within the year—and it remains to be seen if love is a match for the tyranny and hard logic of legal facts. The *Standard* hopes that it will be; in the interest of romance—for the sake of the thousands of young couples married and unmarried who are eagerly watching the strange case, we trust to see the young lawyer and lover score a smashing victory and snatch the girl of his heart from the terrible position in which the snarl of circumstance has placed her."

The fact that Mary Page was beautiful, young, and a popular actress, attracted the notice of thousands; the fact that she was accused of killing a man who was reported to have pursued her, brought the case to the interest of tens of thousands more. And that her lover was to defend her in the trial—that the two had been boy and girl sweet-

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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hearts—that he was young, handsome, devoted, caused the millions of minds in the great city to grasp and hold the situation with eager expectation. Like the editor of the *Standard* they, too, wished the young lawyer success; they desired—and many a one among them was amazed at the thrill which accompanied the thought—a triumph of love.

And then, at last—the dreaded day dawned—gray, cheerless, and forbidding. Mary Page saw it creep through the narrow windows of her cell; from her place of vigil, the hotel window, the mother saw the dawn glance along the narrow ribbons of sky and extend its pale rays between the towering buildings. Langdon, his table littered with papers, feverish, his gaze fixed, saw the day begin bleak and unpromising; before him lay the test of his life, and his jaw set resolutely as he faced it.

“I’ll save her,” he said. “She shall not die for a thing she did not do. I’ll save her, no matter if——”

He paused, and his head sank into his hands; for a long time he sat there, buried in deep thought.

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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A few hours later he bathed and dressed; he forced himself to eat a bit of breakfast, then carefully arranging his papers in his bag he had a cab called and started for the Tombs. The gray pile looked gloomy and ominous in the sunless light; its heavy masonry, its huge doors, caused a feeling of cold to oppress him. But this feeling he put from him with resolution; no outside influence must affect him; the life of the girl he loved was in his hands; he must concentrate upon that fact, and that alone.

Once inside the prison, Langdon was led down the echoing corridors toward Mary's cell, past row after row of monotonous barred doors through which dull faces peered idly. At Mary's door he stopped, his hat came off, tears leaped to his eyes, for there she knelt like a child, her head in her mother's lap.

"And God give us strength to go through this day," prayed the gentle-faced mother. "And grant justice to my child."

"Justice, dear God, justice," Mary murmured; and no artistry of the actress could have given the prayer the power given it by the great sorrow and greater faith.

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## **STRANGE CASE OF MARY PAGE**

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Then she saw Langdon and sprang up. With his arms about her, she looked into his face, all the confidence of perfect love in her eyes.

“Are we to go now, Philip?” she asked quietly.

“Yes,” he said. “The court will open in a very little while and there are some preliminaries, dear.”

Bravely she put on her hat and turned toward the cell door which a keeper was holding open. Her mother took her arm as though to help her. But with a quick smile, Mary said:

“No, no, little mother. It is I who should help you. I am strong, dear; don’t be afraid. I will bear up. You will not be ashamed of me.”

And with that, she took her mother’s arm. Between the two strong, young figures the little, gray-haired, old lady went down the corridor, through the gloomy doorway, and across the “Bridge of Sighs.”

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE FIRST DAYS OF THE TRIAL

THE courtroom was filled to suffocation. A detail of burly policemen were stationed outside the doors to keep back the surging and clamoring crowd. It seemed as if half the town were there demanding admission.

About a table were gathered the District Attorney and his assistants. At another, were the reporters; keen, eager, ready. In rows of seats at one side were the veniremen from which the jury was to be drawn.

The entrance of the beautiful prisoner, her mother, and her counsel caused an instant stir in the courtroom. In spite of the sharp commands of the court officers for them to keep quiet and remain in their seats, many rose to their feet. A murmur of: "There she is!" ran about.

On all sides were heard various remarks bearing on the appearance of the leading figure in this tragic drama.

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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“ Why, she’s even lovelier than the papers said! ”

“ *She* never killed him! You needn’t tell me! ”

“ I don’t believe it either.”

A few moments later, the judge, an elderly man with a long, keen face and big spectacles came in and took his seat upon the bench. After a brief consultation with the District Attorney, Langdon passed man after man with nothing more than a brief question and a searching look.

“ Hello! I thought you meant to present a freak case, Langdon,” said the District Attorney in a whispered aside. “ And that sort of a thing requires a freak jury to bring about results.”

But Langdon answered calmly:

“ All I require of the jury is intelligence.”

The reporters also noted the celerity with which the jury was selected, and their surprise went down in amazed paragraphs. The crowd in the seats in the body of the court drew some significance from Langdon’s attitude.

“ Depend upon it, it means something,” stated an eager watcher of the proceedings.

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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“That young fellow looks clever; he ain’t passing them that way without something up his sleeve.”

Then Dallas arose and in his positive, cutting manner, stated the commonwealth’s case. Mary Page stood accused and indicted of the killing of David Pollock; he admitted, rather reluctantly, that no one saw her fire the shot.

“But,” he concluded, “the State has responsible witnesses who will show that the girl, Mary Page, bore the dead man no good will—that she had attempted his life upon at least one occasion before, and that it was impossible for anyone to have shot him on that night at Falconi’s, but she.”

Witnesses were called to fix Mary’s identity. Daniels, shifty, evasive, his eyes looking no one in the face, testified that Pollock provided the money to open Covington’s Theater; and that the sole reason was to provide Mary with a chance to star.

“What reasons did he give for this?” asked the district attorney.

“He said he was in love with her.”

Shale, hard-eyed and confident, proclaimed his years of friendship with Pollock

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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when called to the stand. When asked about the incident in Central Park he told of it in great detail.

“As soon as she saw Pollock get out of the car,” he stated, leaning forward in his chair, “she pulled out the revolver and pointed it at him. She’d have shot him then and there if it hadn’t been for a park policeman coming in between them.”

The park policeman was then called and corroborated, as far as his observation went, the story told by Shale; then the latter was recalled and identified the revolver.

“It belonged to Pollock. She got it from him that same night in her dressing-room after the show. He told me about it. I guess she had it in her mind——”

But here Shale was stopped; and as he descended from the witness chair, he cast a look at Mary, who sat, white and attentive, which was full of cruel meaning.

Witness followed witness; they were policemen, detectives, waiters, and members of the supper party at Falconi’s. Bit by bit they laid the structure of the State’s case; statement by statement was as a bitter cement which held the whole in place.

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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It was a common thing for rich men to finance beautiful women with stage ambitions, so ran another sort of testimony. Of course there were bargains struck—understandings were had; prices were paid. To the initiated, it was understood that such a condition of affairs existed between—

Like a tiger Langdon leaped upon each shred of such testimony and rent it with burning words. But in spite of his efforts, it managed to creep in; by trickery, by ways known to the practiced criminal counsel, Dallas managed to get the idea before the jury that Mary Page was nothing more than one who had bartered herself for preferment, and then in a rage, under the influence of drink, so the testimony of Falconi's waiters ran—had killed her patron.

A wave of indignation swept over the spectators; angry glances were shot at the district attorney; muttered execrations hung over the throng. But the court officers suppressed this. Langdon, pale, but cold as ice, fought to have this part of the evidence stricken out.

“It is a sin blacker than any built into the foundation of hell,” cried he, with blazing

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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eyes and gesticulating hands. "If the laws of evidence do not touch it, the laws of right, of charity, of common justice, should!"

The judge, reluctantly, as was perfectly evident, was forced to decide in favor of the state's attorney; the reporters wrote feverishly; the sensation of the first day of the trial had appeared and the evening editions were sure of a feature worthy of type of any size.

Accompanied by her mother and Langdon, Mary went back to the Tombs. At the door of her cell, their arms about her, she said:

"It all seems very terrible. For the first time I see what they mean to do; intelligence, malice, and falsehood are against me. I, who have never wronged anyone—those who seem determined upon my destruction, least of all—am like a bait thrown to the wolves."

When he left her in the cheerless cell, Langdon saw the kind, brave little mother to her hotel; then he went at once to his office, and with tired eyes and tense face plunged into the mass of testimony taken that day and began to prepare for the next.

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*OF MARY PAGE*

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The newspapers next morning contained complete reports of the testimony. That part of it which Langdon had fought so bitterly received the greatest amount of space. The tactics of the district attorney were not approved of even by those papers of the same political complexion as that official. The *Standard* once more editorially said:

“ As we said yesterday, Dallas is an expert in his line—he knows the value of evidence—and he especially knows the value of certain things upon the jury. The *Standard* most emphatically takes exception to his methods. Like a great many other district attorneys who have preceded him, he seems to think his whole duty is to *convict*. As a matter of fact, his duty is to bring out the truth.

“ This newspaper believes that certain evidence which he succeeded in introducing yesterday is a tissue of low rumor which even he himself does not believe. Such things have a baneful effect; they hold an insidious poison which finds its way into the minds of even those who fancy they have rejected it.”

On the second day of the trial the state

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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rested. Dallas had rapidly marshaled his evidence and hurled it in a solid mass to the jury. His years of experience in dealing with such bodies of men had taught him that this was the best way of impressing them; a swift, constant, never-stopping attack often made a weak case overwhelming. At the end of this second day Mary Page, as she arose from her seat at the table, looked at Langdon with questioning eyes. To her the future meant the young attorney; he was the knight who was to front those who menaced her; he was the challenger who was to ride up to the castle of darkness—that gloomy, plausible, terrifying edifice erected by the prosecution, and boldly issue his defiance. And if he failed—she clutched his arm in both her trembling hands.

“ Philip,” she said, “ I am afraid.”

The spectators, newly arisen, saw him put his arm about her; his head bent and he whispered:

“ My dear! Have courage. They have done their worst. We know all they can say or do. The days to come will show what *we* have to set against it. And when the end comes,” here he smiled, though there was no

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## OF MARY PAGE

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mirth in it, "we'll tumble over their structure like a house of cards."

Again the public prints came out with reports of the testimony. Their views of the matter were almost unanimously pessimistic. The case built up by Dallas was a powerful one; he had proved that Mary Page had killed David Pollock almost beyond a question of doubt.

"Shale's testimony shows that she had in her possession the revolver with which the deed was done," commented the *Star*. "The testimony of a half dozen more shows that she had quarreled with him; the park policeman showed plainly that she had once before attempted his life. The management of Falconi's, a dozen waiters, and members of the supper party, in a group, proved that she and she alone could have fired the shot, because there was no one else in the room. On the whole it was a dark day for the accused girl. Perhaps tomorrow will be better. We trust so. But the State closed strongly and we doubt if the solid weight of its evidence can be shaken."

Most of the newspapers now turned their attention to Philip Langdon. Once more

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## ***STRANGE CASE OF MARY PAGE***

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they began to feature the expected unusualness of the evidence that he was to offer in rebuttal. Again the drawings of the finger marks upon the soft flesh of the girl's shoulder appeared. The highly imaginative pens of the chroniclers of the trial seemed dipped in the very wildest conjecture. Langdon's office and apartment were besieged with newspaper men.

“My goodness!” said the young attorney’s astonished stenographer, “those young men from the newspapers are the most pushing kind of a bunch, ain’t they? They just won’t take no for an answer.”

## CHAPTER XVII

### A CASE OF MUTUAL SUSPICION

LANGDON's face, as he sat in his private office, his papers spread out before him, was like a mask. What his secret thoughts were, it would not have been possible for the most acute to secure even an inkling.

Minutely, with all the precision of a machine, he went over and over his notes, arranging them in order for the work of the following day. He was deep in his task when there came a knock on his door.

"Come in," he said without raising his head.

The stenographer looked into the room.

"Mr. Daniels to see you," she announced.

A strange look came into Langdon's face.

"I'm very busy just now. Tell him to come some other time."

"He says he has something very important to communicate; something about the case."

Langdon laid down his pen. For the first time he looked up.

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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“Let him come in, then,” he said quietly.

Daniels entered. His heavy face was haggard, and his whole appearance was disheveled and neglected. Fumblingly he drew forward a chair, and, as he did so, spoke in a husky voice.

“Kind of a surprise, Langdon, eh?”

“Somewhat.” The young attorney looked at him searchingly. “As you may suppose, Mr. Daniels, I am rather pressed for time just now; and I hope you are not disposed to waste any of it.”

“No,” Daniels gestured with one hand. “I came here just as I said to the girl outside there—on important business about—er—” he wavered and hesitated; then his shifty eye caught sight of a small portrait of Mary Page upon the young man’s desk, and he nodded, relieved—“about her.”

A sort of spasm convulsed Langdon’s handsome face; but in an instant it was gone, and he faced his visitor collectedly:

“I am pleased to hear that,” said he. “I think you know that I propose calling you as a witness.”

Daniels nodded; his thick fingers fidgeted with the rim of his hat, and he cleared his

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throat in a series of short coughs. "Yes, you told me," said he. "You wanted me to testify about the thing that happened in Miss Page's dressing-room after the show on the first night of 'Seekers.' "

"Yes." Langdon regarded him steadily. "That and some other things." He picked up an ivory paper cutter and tapped with the point of it upon the desk. "There are several little things which I'd like to inquire about—when I get you on the stand. For example, the conversation between you and Pollock in the upper hall at Falconi's just before the killing."

The face of Daniels went a sickly gray; but he grinned as he said:

"Conversation? Me and Pollock?"

"There was one, was there not?"

Daniels stirred in his chair; it was plain that his mind was struggling back to the fateful night—that he was trying to recollect things which later events had dimmed.

"Yes," said he, at length, "there was. But," with a sudden forward movement of the head, "I didn't think anybody knew about it."

"It was overheard," said Langdon. "Al-

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## **THE STRANGE CASE**

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most word for word it will be repeated in court."

Daniels sat staring for a moment, his brows gathered thickly over the shifty eyes. Then slowly a look of cunning drifted into his face, his mouth once more widened into a grin.

"I get you," said he. "I see how it happened." The grin expanded into a laugh, and he waved his hand into a knowing gesture. "And I think," nodding his head with ghastly enjoyment, "I could pick out the party who did the overhearing."

There was a pause. The two men sat regarding each other in silence; Langdon still tapped at the desk with the ivory paper knife, but the taps were not quite so light or so steady as before; his whole attitude seemed to have grown suddenly strained; the corners of his mouth twitched, ever so slightly. Daniels was the first to speak.

"I've never done much gambling," said he, his head still nodding. "The reason is that I never believed there was any kind of a bet that could be called a safe one. But I take all that back. I know of one that is perfectly safe. And that one is: that I

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know the man who heard what I said to Pollock in the hallway that night and what Pollock said to me."

"You do!" Langdon bent forward a trifle. The faces of the two men were at no great distance apart; the expression of one was of cunning—of almost derision; that of the other was strange and tense.

"Did you hear anybody on the stand tell that I was in the supper-room with the rest of them when the shot was fired?" asked Daniels. "Eh?" But as Langdon made no reply, he went on. "You didn't, did you? And why? Because I *wasn't* there. That's why. I *wasn't* there." He slapped the arm of Langdon's chair with one hand and went on. "After my talk with Pollock in the hall, I didn't go back there. I was too sore, I wouldn't have been fit company for even that lot of low-brows. I went downstairs; I was going to quit the whole thing. Come what might, I was going to chuck it up. But down in the lower hall—maybe the air was different—I sort of changed my mind. I had responsibilities that I couldn't shirk, and to just jump out wouldn't do. I saw that. If I'd only my-

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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self to think of I wouldn't have done it; but there was Covington's, there was—but anyhow, I went back."

"You went back!" Langdon moistened his dry lips with his tongue. "You went back."

"I went back!" Daniels settled into his chair; the grin upon his haggard face was not a pleasant thing to see, and his shifty eyes seemed full of evil promise. "I went back up the stairs and when I reached the hall on the second floor—the one where Pollock and me talked—I saw something."

Again there was a pause. Langdon continued to stare at Daniels, the same strained look in his face; and once more it was the theatrical manager who broke the silence.

"Doors should always be shut," said he. "That is, when people don't care to have others know they are around. A man lurking behind a partly closed door is sure to attract the very attention he's trying to avoid."

"Ah!" The sound seemed to whistle in Langdon's throat. "I see."

"There ain't been nothing said in this trial about that man," said Daniels. "No-

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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body saw him—nobody but me, that is—come quietly out of the side room and go down the hall toward the room where Pollock was killed."

Langdon extended a trembling hand toward Daniels, his mouth opened as though he were about to burst into excited speech, he half arose from his chair. But the hand fell; the mouth closed without a sound; he sank back into the chair once more and sat staring.

"I came in here tonight to mention this little matter," said Daniels, one hand caressing his unshaven chin. "I ain't got weak nerves or anything; but I don't mind saying that this thing's got my goat. I've read all the evening papers, and there's not one of them that don't think Mary Page is up against it, hard. If something ain't done she'll go to the chair."

"No! No!" cried Langdon. "It will never come to that."

"It will, if certain things ain't told," said Daniels. "I'm no snitcher. I don't believe in telling all I know—for sometimes there's things done that have a good reason for being done. But this girl is all right, see?"

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## **STRANGE CASE OF MARY PAGE**

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She's on the level. And I won't see her harmed more than she is already."

He got up and stood nervously finger-ing his hat.

"As I said, I'm no snitcher," he con-tinued. "But I thought it best to come in and talk to you a little. If the girl can be got off without it, I'll not open my mouth; but if she can't—I'll tell all I know."

"You will!" Langdon was now upon his feet also, holding to the back of his chair as though for support.

"I will," said Daniels. "I swear I will. I don't care to do it—I don't want to do it—do you understand?" His hand was on the knob and he was speaking over his shoulder. "But if I must, I will. I'm no snitcher, but by God, I will."

The door opened and closed upon him. For a moment Philip Langdon stood star-ing at the paneled surface, then he sank back into his chair, his arms rested among the papers upon the desk, his face was rigid, his eyes staring straight ahead.

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## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE DEFENSE SCORES IN TURN

WHEN the judge took his place on the bench next morning there was an air of expectancy in the court. The jury looked keen and eager; the spectators leaned forward in their places, anxious to miss nothing. Dallas, the district attorney, talked in low tones with his assistants, his eyes never leaving Langdon; the reporters were keyed for sensation and wore the air of men who had the chance of their lives before them.

And Mary Page! Calm, but with no color in her lovely face, she sat beside her mother. That a crisis was impending she knew; and her lips moved in silent prayer.

“Oh, God,” she prayed, “give me courage, and give Philip the vision to see the truth, and the power to bring it forth.”

When the court opened, Langdon arose and made a short statement of what he proposed to prove by the witnesses he had waiting. Somehow, the watchful reporters

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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noticed, he seemed hesitating; one hand fumbled at the papers which lay before him on the table—his eyes strayed constantly out over the spectators as though he expected to see a face there—the face of one whose presence might be of great moment.

“He’s lost his nerve,” spoke young Telford of the *Star*, to a famous ‘sob sister,’ who sat next to him at the reporters’ table. “I don’t wonder at it, seeing that it’s his first big criminal case and that he’s got so much at stake. But who is he looking for in the crowd? He can’t keep his attention on the jury for a moment at a time.”

“A witness whom he is anxious to have present,” suggested the newspaper woman.

But Telford seemed doubtful.

“It may be,” said he. “But, somehow, his expression seems to indicate something else.”

But as Langdon went on, his attention became fixed upon the work at hand; he faced the jury steadily and with the manner of a man who believed absolutely in the cause he was pleading; his voice had the ring of conviction; his argument possessed power and

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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a keen observation of the facts. In conclusion, he said:

“ The State’s witnesses, to the number of a dozen, have testified that Mary Page rushed out of the supper-room and down the hall at Falconi’s on that fateful night. A moment later the revolver shot sounded and in still another moment she was found lying in a faint upon the floor of the room engaged by David Pollock—and Pollock lay dead—shot through the heart—almost beside her.

“ One witness of this sort would have been sufficient for the State’s purpose, the defense does not deny any of this testimony. As a matter of fact, it is all in line with the truth, which it desires to bring out. We will show by witnesses that Mary Page had absolutely no recollection of what took place after she rushed away from the party of drunken revelers in the private supper-room. We will show that she is a sufferer from a momentary mental derangement superinduced by the sight of intoxication—a thing which had clung to her since one dreadful night ten years ago. And the first witness I will call to pave the way for this testimony will be Mary Page herself.”

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A thrill ran through the courtroom; the unexpected had happened. Amidst dead silence the beautiful girl arose; assisted by Langdon she took the chair used by witnesses. The pencils of the reporters sped like mad over their pads of copy paper.

“Langdon is running true to form,” wrote the facile Telford. “His attitude promised drama and he is living up to the promise. With the skill of an experienced stage manager he produces what must be his most effective witness first. Mary Page’s effect upon a jury must not be held lightly; for the girl’s beauty is wonderful; she is like an exquisite flower set in the dingy courtroom, and the eyes of all—judge, jury, spectators, and counsel, seldom leave her face.”

The “sob sister” read this over his shoulder, and smiled.

“Wrong,” she said. “Langdon is not playing the effect of the girl’s beauty upon the jury. He means something more—mark my words.”

Langdon, when the hush had lasted some moments and Mary had been sworn, spoke to her in a low voice.

“Miss Page, isn’t it true that you were

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## OF MARY PAGE

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born with a marked aversion to intoxicants—a sort of prenatal influence?"

"Yes," replied Mary Page in a low voice.

The district attorney bounded to his feet.

"I object," he shouted. "This question involves something which took place before the birth of the witness—a thing of which she can only know by hearsay."

"Objection sustained," said the judge briefly.

Langdon bowed, and said calmly:

"Very well, Your Honor. I withdraw the question, and excuse the witness—unless the State's attorney desires to cross-examine." And as Dallas shook his head, frowning, he helped the girl down from the stand, saying: "In her place, I will call Mrs. Margaret Page, her mother."

Quietly the little, white-haired woman arose and took her place; her sweet face with its worn look and gentle eyes made an instant impression.

"Having missed his first blow," wrote Telford of the *Star*, "the attorney for the defense recovers his poise instantly and tries with a second—and one every bit as effective."

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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Gently Langdon began to question the mother; in a low voice, but one perfectly audible to the jury, she answered; and the answers brought out the tragedy of her life.

Thirty years before, so the story was told, bit by bit, she had first met Tom Page, who afterward became her husband and Mary's father. They loved each other, but it was some time before she would consent to marry him.

"He drank," she said gently. "And I would not be his wife until he gave it up for good."

Tom Page promised; they were married, but the promise did not last. One night—the night the young wife had planned to tell him that sweetest of all stories—that a child was to be born to them—he came reeling into the little home—drunk. The horror of the thing sickened her.

"It is no wonder my baby was born with a fear of drink," she said gently, as before. "It's a wonder I didn't die."

Night after night she walked the floor waiting for him to come home. And on the night Mary was born he was in a room be-

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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low—but too dulled with liquor to be told that his child had come into the world.

Years passed, and the horror of anyone intoxicated grew with Mary's growth. Then one evening—it was ten years past, and Mary was a budding girl, Tom Page awaking from a drunken sleep before the fire, demanded money for liquor. Being refused he seized his wife by the throat; she cried out in terror; Mary aroused from her bed rushed into the room in her nightdress. Filled with unspeakable horror—the horror of drink—and with fear for her mother, she tried to save her. Maddened the father turned upon her and his powerful hand grasped her naked shoulder, his fingers tearing the flesh, leaving a deep, savage impress. What more he would have done—

Here the story was interrupted by a cry from Mary Page. White as death, her blue eyes staring, she swayed in her chair. With a leap, Langdon was at her side, supporting her. With one arm about her, he appealed to the jury.

“Gentlemen, what more proof of the influence of drink upon this girl do you want than this. The mere recital of what occurred

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## *THE STRANGE CASE*

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that night brings on the condition of which I spoke."

Intently the jury leaned forward; a tall man in a frock coat hurried into the enclosure.

"Dr. Foster!" Langdon greeted him gladly. "It's fortunate that you are here."

The deft fingers of the alienist undid the girl's waist so as to allow her to breathe more freely; as he did so his eyes caught something and he spoke in a low tone to Langdon. Instantly the young counselor, with unlifted hands, spoke excitedly to the eager jury.

"And if you desire physical evidence, gentlemen, of the effects of that night upon this girl—look!"

As the young attorney spoke, Dr. Foster bared the left shoulder of Mary Page. Deep, angry red were the imprints of the powerful hand upon the dazzling flesh. The trembling finger of Langdon pointed at this.

"Normally this brand cannot be seen," cried he. "Her shoulder is then unmarked. But under the stress of that mental condition of which I have spoken, it reappears—a

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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physical symbol of her mental state—the tearing grip of her drunken father's hand."

A wave of amazement swept over the court; voices sounded the surprise of their owners; the court officers called continuously for silence; the judge rapped angrily upon his desk. And above all the clamor the voice of the district attorney cried furiously:

“I object, your Honor—I object!”

At length, after several emotional persons had been thrust from the room, order was restored. Mary, under the doctor's treatment, recovered consciousness, the judge lectured the spectators and then turned his attention to the legal aspects of what had just happened.

“What you have just seen and heard,” said he to the jury, “was not produced in the recognized way and is therefore not evidence. The jury is requested to forget it—at least until it is introduced in the proper manner.”

Then Mrs. Page went on with her testimony. She told how Mary, in her fear of her drunken father, seemed to suddenly lose control of herself. She darted from the house in her nightdress, screaming and

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## **THE STRANGE CASE**

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laughing and tossing her arms. She met several persons on the road while in this condition. One of these was Philip Langdon. He, seeing the seriousness of the young girl's condition, secured a conveyance and, with the mother's consent, carried the girl to the city for immediate treatment. The mother talked to the daughter before she was taken away; and strange to relate, the girl had not the faintest remembrance of the terrible scene with her father, or what had followed it.

At this point Langdon excused the witness and called Dr. Foster to the stand. As the noted brain specialist took his place, a buzz commenced; but the judge and court officers checked this instantly. The celebrated physician's appearance caused a stir to also go through the reporters; pencils flew and the lines they traced on the drab sheets were scrawling and explosive.

“Dr. Angus Foster,” wrote young Telford “is one of the world's recognized specialists on the brain. His great work ‘Lesions and Nerve Cells,’ is one prized by scholars and physicians; and the masterly results he has accomplished by his researches in obscure

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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causation, has practically revolutionized the study of mental ailments."

After the physician was sworn, Langdon, after a few preliminary questions, asked:

"Dr. Foster, do you remember those events which took place after midnight on June 16th, 1905?"

"I do," replied the doctor.

"Will you please relate them to the jury?"

"It was in the neighborhood of two o'clock—really the morning of the 17th—when my man knocked on my bedroom door saying that I was urgently needed. I went down at once. In the hall was a young man, and he held in his arms a girl, scantily dressed and apparently in a serious condition. The girl was Mary Page and the man is the counsel for the defense."

"When you examined the girl what did you find?"

"That she was suffering from a sort of collapse following temporary dementia caused by shock. I brought out the fact that she had been suffering from a wild delirium following acute agony and fear, reacting upon a supersensitive nervous system, and a subconscious dread."

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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Question after question was asked by Langdon, and to all, the alienist gave grave answers. In reply to one of these, Dr. Foster said:

“Yes; I made tests of the girl’s sanity on the spot. I used the Kistler test—the Herret test, and certain ones of my own. They lasted through four hours.”

“And what did you say at their end?”

“I said that the girl was sane; but that what she had undergone might bring about a condition as ‘suppressed psychosis.’ That is, it was possible for the effects of the shock she had undergone to remain in her brain and she never aware of it, until a repetition of its cause brought on its effects once more.”

“Did you not warn me to see to it that she was kept from the sight of intoxication?”

“I did. For that was the thing most likely to cause a reappearance of the trouble.”

There was dead silence in the courtroom, and through it came the voice of Langdon, addressing the judge:

“Your Honor, I desire to ask the witness a purely hypothetical question, one to be admitted as evidence of facts.”

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**OF MARY PAGE**

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The court nodded; and turning to the alienist, the young attorney said:

“Dr. Foster, in the face of the terrible effect you know the sight of drunkenness had upon Mary Page that night, could you, as an expert, say that it was possible years afterwards, if she were decoyed to a drunken supper party and fled from it only to fall into the hands of a drunken beast in another room, that she could shoot him in a moment of aberration, superinduced by the sight of intoxication, and afterwards in her normal state have no remembrance of it?”

“Yes,” replied the brain specialist briefly.

“Cross-examine!” said Langdon, with a triumphant wave of his hand to Dallas. Like a tiger, the District Attorney attacked Dr. Foster. But satire, sneers, and brow-beating were alike wasted on the scientist. His answers were calm; behind them was the weight of his scholarship and his years of intelligent research. For more than an hour the State’s counsel threw himself against this wall of certainty with no effect.

“That will do,” he said sullenly. “Your Honor I will call this witness again later on.”

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE VERDICT

WHILE all this was proceeding, Daniels, manager of the Covington, sat deep among the spectators. His face was as haggard as it had been the night before. He had made some shift to remove the stubble of beard, and his dress was more tidy. But he had lost none of his look of deep-seated trouble. Indeed, if anything, this expression was intensified.

He sat paying the closest attention to the testimony, gnawing his nails, and betraying every sign of extreme dissatisfaction. As Dr. Foster stepped from the stand, the manager, who was seated in a chair on the aisle, reached out and plucked a court attendant by the sleeve.

“ I want to speak to Langdon—lawyer for the defense,” said he in a husky whisper.

“ The trial cannot be interrupted,” returned the man. “ You must not——”

“ I don’t want to interrupt anything,” said Daniels in a slightly higher tone which caused those in the vicinity to look around.

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## ***STRANGE CASE OF MARY PAGE***

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“ I only want to speak a word to him. This ain’t no kind of a way to do; he’ll never get a jury to believe the stuff he’s handing them up there. That girl must——”

But the court officer stopped him.

“ Keep still! ” The man looked at the manager of the Covington sternly. “ If you don’t, you’ll have to get out.”

For an instant it seemed as though Daniels would leap up and burst into an outcry of some sort; but with an effort, he pulled himself together and sank back into his seat.

“ Don’t mind me,” said he, his hand gesturing apologetically. “ I’m interested in this case, and it’s got me a little nervous.” Then an idea coming to him, he added eagerly: “ I say, would you take a note up to Langdon for me—about something he ought to do? ”

The court officer nodded. Daniels tore a leaf from a notebook and scrawled some words upon it; this he folded carefully and handed to the other. In a few moments the note was in Langdon’s hands and he glanced at it hastily. Then young Telford of the *Star* saw his face pale and his hand tighten upon the back of a chair.

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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"Hello," commented that observant youth, "Langdon seems to have heard from the party he was looking so anxiously for some time ago, and it's knocked him a-twister!"

The newspaper writers who heard this, looked at the attorney for the defense with curious eyes; they saw him crush the slip of paper in his hands and noted that his eyes searched the sea of faces in the body of the courtroom. His gaze rested upon Daniels in his chair on the aisle; he lifted a hand in a gesture of acquiescence and Daniels, his haggard face glowering, gestured in return.

"Something's coming," breathed the *Star* man with the unerring instinct of a practiced reporter.

Slowly Langdon turned toward the bench and looked at the judge; then his eyes went to the jury who sat alert and silent; and, last, he looked into the beautiful pale face of Mary Page turned so trustfully toward him:

With a sweep of the hand which contained an unmistakable finality, he gathered up the documents in the case which littered the table; then he threw them aside with the air of a man to whom they could be of no further

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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use, and once more faced the court, his face tense and one hand lifted.

“I request,” said he, in a clear voice, “that Mr. Shale be called.”

The court crier shouted the name; the tip-staves took it up; the doorman opened the door leading into the hall and cried it over the heads of the throng gathered there. In a few moments Shale appeared from the corridor, and took his place with much self-possession, upon the witness stand. Langdon stood regarding him for a moment, then slowly came the question:

“Mr. Shale, it was you who identified the revolver with which David Pollock was killed, was it not?”

“It was,” replied Shale, in a satisfied way. “I knew that revolver well, and——”

“You will kindly confine yourself to answering the questions put to you,” said Langdon coldly. Then: “Who was the owner of the revolver?”

“Pollock.”

“Was it the same revolver Mary Page pointed at Pollock in the park as you testified the other day?”

“It was.”

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## THE STRANGE CASE

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“ You are quite sure of this? ”

“ I am.”

Langdon looked at the judge.

“ Your Honor, I would like to have this witness step down for a moment; and have William Morgan called to the stand.”

This was done; Shale took a seat inside the rail, still with the confident smirk upon his face, and the mounted policeman who had figured in the episode in the park faced the counsel for the defense.

“ Mr. Morgan, you recall the affair in which you testified you saw the prisoner point a revolver at David Pollock? ”

“ Yes, sir,” replied the mounted policeman.

“ When you rode between them what did the girl do with the weapon? ”

“ She dropped it.”

“ Did she pick it up again? ”

“ No, sir.” The man started surprisedly, “ she fainted and had to be carried away.”

“ I was present at the time, you remember. Did I pick it up? ”

“ No, sir: it was you who carried Miss Page up on the lawn and revived her.”

“ Did Pollock pick up the weapon? ”

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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“ No, sir. I recall that he got at once into his automobile; and I saw the revolver shining in the road after he did so.”

“ Who else was present beside Miss Page, Pollock, and myself? ”

The mounted policeman pointed to Shale.

“ That gentleman.”

“ Did he get out of the car? ”

“ He did, after everything was over—to crank it.”

“ That will do, Mr. Morgan, and thank you.”

The policeman stepped down and Langdon gestured to Shale.

“ If you please, Mr. Shale,” said he.

There was a subtle alteration in Shale’s manner as he once more took the stand. He still wore the smirk, but it held less confidence than before; and his hands clutched the arms of the witness chair until his knuckles stood out, white and prominent.

“ Mr. Shale,” said Langdon steadily, “ what did you do with the revolver you picked up out of the road that night? ”

“ Me! ” Shale lifted his voice and pushed his head forward. “ I didn’t pick up no revolver. The cop must be wrong. The

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## **THE STRANGE CASE**

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girl must have picked it up; if she didn't," triumphantly, "how did it get into the room where Pollock was killed?"

"You took it there, you white-livered skunk!" The voice was the voice of Daniels, he stood up in his place and one quivering finger was pointed at Shale. In a moment the court officers had seized him; all in the room were upon their feet; the place was a sudden whirling vortex of sound. Above it all the voice of Langdon was heard shouting:

"Bring that man forward!" Then as Shale, pasty-faced and trembling, slipped from the witness-stand, Langdon added: "Stop him! Don't let him leave the room!" Two stalwart court officers seized Shale as the young attorney turned to the astonished judge upon the bench. "I charge that man with the murder of David Pollock."

By the most vigorous methods, order was restored. Daniels was led forward; Shale stood panting and glaring between the men who held him.

"Mr. Langdon," spoke the court gravely, "this whole proceeding is most unusual."

"It is, and for that I beg the Court's patience and toleration," said Langdon.

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## OF MARY PAGE

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The judge looked at Daniels and in a cold, decisive manner said:

“ You have, if I heard correctly, charged this man,” indicating Shale, “ with having taken the revolver with which this murder was done, into the death-room.”

“ That’s right,” cried Daniels. “ And I charge him with more than that. Five minutes before Dave Pollock was shot I came upstairs at Falconi’s to fix up a little falling out that Pollock and I had had. I seen him,” pointing to Langdon, “ trying doors at the far end of a side passage, trying to find the supper-room where our party was being held; and as I turned to go toward Pollock’s room I saw a door standing a little open and him,” pointing to Shale, “ standing behind it.”

“ You lie!” screamed Shale. “ You lie!”

“ I saw him!” maintained Daniels, “ and he had that ivory-handled revolver in his hand.”

A murmur arose; the pencils of the reporters went like mad.

“ Go on,” said the judge.

“ I saw something was up and hid in the side passage and watched. Then I saw him

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## **THE STRANGE CASE**

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sneak out, look all around, and the gun still in his hand, go down the hall and into Pollock's room."

Again came the murmur, louder than before; the court called for order sharply, and Daniels went on.

"I crept to Pollock's door; it wasn't tightly closed and I peeped in. I saw Shale and Pollock standing in the middle of the floor. Then there was a lot of sounds from the supper party; the door of that room opened and shut and Mary Page came tearing down the hall like mad and past me into Pollock's room and tumbled on the floor. Pollock reached out to hit Shale; then Shale shot him, threw the gun on the floor and climbed out at a fire escape from a window. I didn't want to be mixed up in the thing, so I shut the door and slipped into the room where I had seen Shale hiding. Then the crowd rushed out of the supper-room and the police came."

In dead silence the judge turned toward Shale.

"You have heard the charge made against you. What have you to say in your defense?"

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## *OF MARY PAGE*

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Shale, his brain apparently numbed with the terror of the moment, swallowed several times. Then he said gaspingly:

“Pollock lied about me. He said I was crooked. And I didn’t shoot until he struck me—it was in self-defense, and—”

A shout went up. This time the judge did not attempt to stop it; the very court officers joined in; even the reporters were upon their feet, cheering.

“Mother! Philip!” Mary Page, with the arms of both about her, her sweet face turning from one to the other. “What’s to become of *me*—now?”

Above the roar of the excited room the exultant voice of Langdon rang like a trumpet.

“May it please the court, the prisoner desires to know what’s to become of her.”

“She’s discharged!” And then amid the renewed outcries, the judge added: “And Shale is committed to await the action of the grand jury.”

And when the motor car, which had been called for them, whirled them from amidst the hundreds of cheering people outside the building, to whom the news had come like

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## **STRANGE CASE OF MARY PAGE**

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a thunder clap, Mary nestled close to Langdon.

“And, dear Philip, you never suspected.”

“That Shale was the guilty one—no. I had all along suspected Daniels, and had been trying to collect evidence to place the crime at his door. It was not until last night when Daniels came to me that I had a ray of the real truth; but even then I could do nothing but bide my time. I had no evidence.”

“You must not talk any more about it,” said the quiet voice of Mrs. Page. “Tomorrow, Mary, you go back with me to the country until you have put this dreadful thing out of your mind completely.”

“And then,” said Mary wistfully, “I will come back and take up my work.”

Langdon pressed the finger tips which he held, to his lips.

“You will come back—and marry me,” spoke he in a masterful way. “A fee is always paid a lawyer for services rendered; and that is what I claim as my due.”

And what the low-voiced reply was that came from the charming lips of Mary Page, not even her mother knew.

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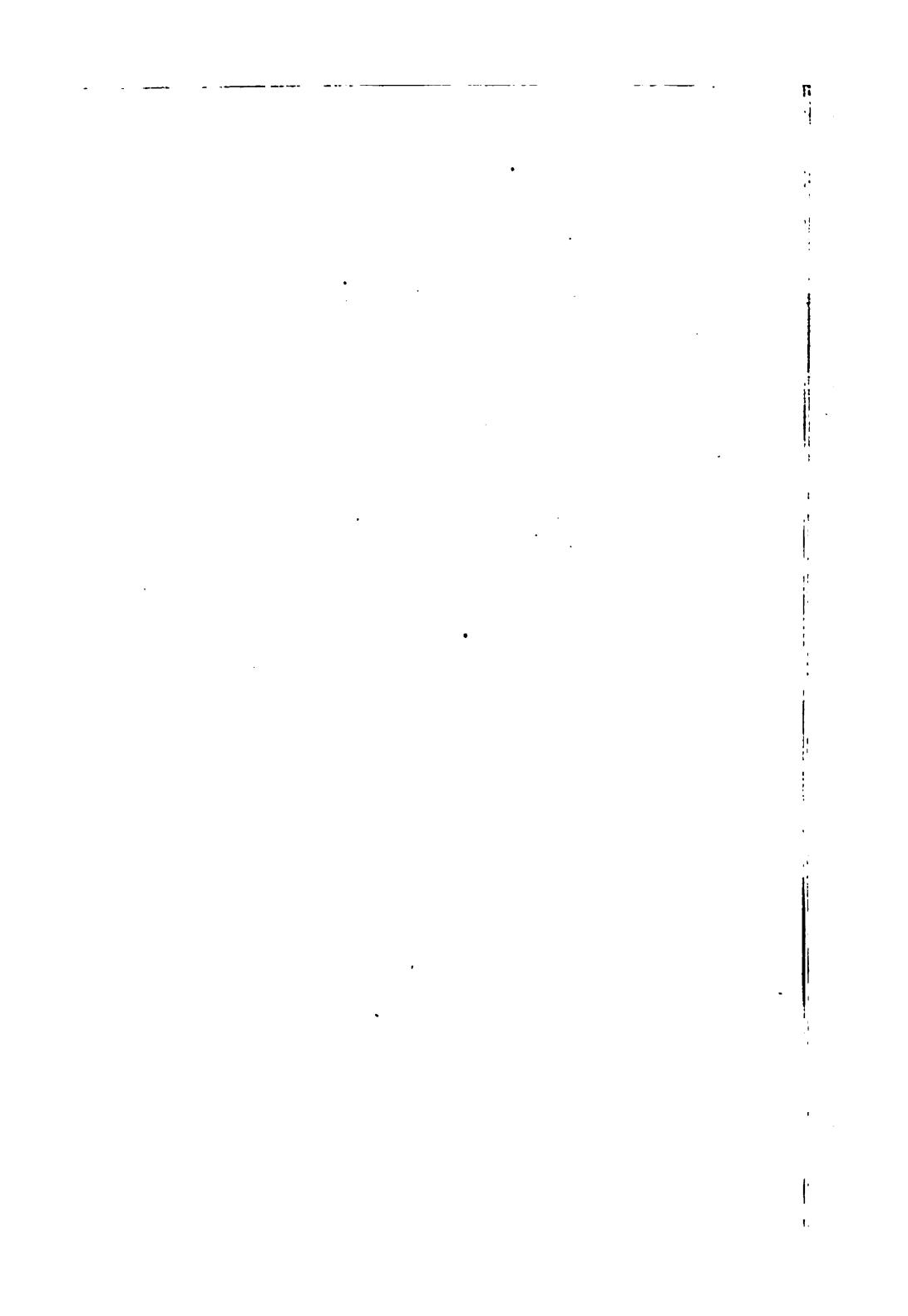
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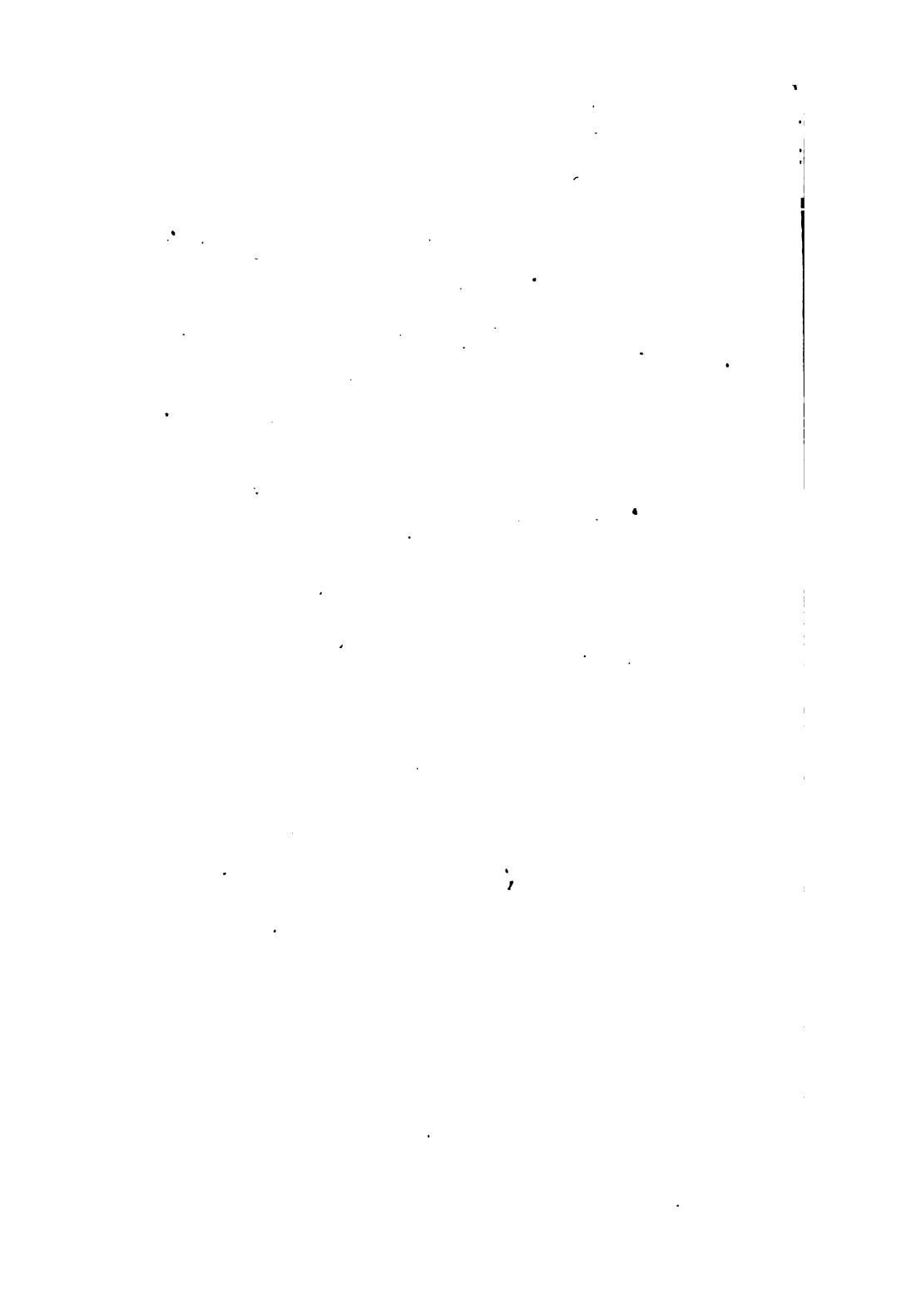
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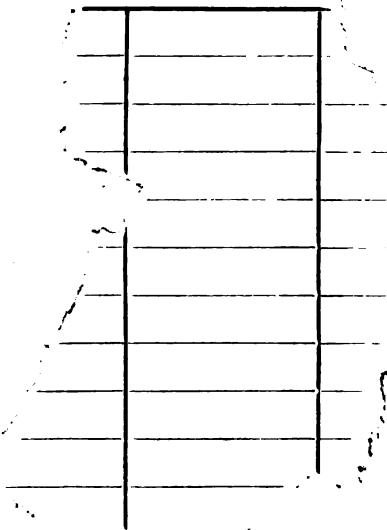
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